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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 13 October 1992, at 3 p.m.

President:	Mr. MONGBE (Vice-President)	(Benin)
later:	Mr DANGUE REWAKA (Vice-President)	(Gabon)

- Social Development: (a) Questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family [93] (*continued*)

  Conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons:

  (i) Report of the Secretary-General
  (ii) Draft resolution

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In the absence of the President, Mr. Mongbe (Benin), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 93 (*continued*)

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: (a) QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY

CONCLUSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE OF DISABLED PERSONS:

(i) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/47/415)

(ii) DRAFT RESOLUTION (A/46/L.4)

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from French): This afternoon the General Assembly, in accordance with the decision taken at its 3rd plenary meeting, is holding the fourth and last of the plenary meetings to mark the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, under sub-item (a) of agenda item 93.

Mr. OFFMANN (Mauritius): It is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to address this Assembly today. I should like, on behalf of the Government of Mauritius, to congratulate the United Nations for having taken the laudable initiative of convening, for the first time in its history, a series of special plenary meetings devoted to the issue of the disabled. This, in itself, is a clear demonstration of the importance the international community attaches to an issue that directly concerns some 500 million people around the world. As we all know, concern for such a large section of the human population began to express itself when the United Nations took the bold decision to declare 1981 the International Year of Disabled Persons and with the Organization's subsequent declaration of the Decade of Disabled Persons and the elaboration of the World Programme of Action.

(Mr. Offmann, Mauritius)

Unfortunately, in many parts of the developing world, the Programme of Action and the 10 points contained in the Agenda could not be translated into reality - not necessarily for lack of interest, but rather as a result of the paucity of resources, deterioration in the general standards of living, unfavourable terms of trade between the countries of the North and those of the South, the extraordinarily low priority given to the issue of disability by donor agencies and the total indifference to this problem by international financing institutions in their prescription of structural adjustment programmes.

In Mauritius, however, favourable circumstances have enabled the Government to pay special attention to its disabled citizens and to take a series of measures aimed at enhancing the status of people with disabilities. In fact, the Decade of Disabled Persons has also been the decade of economic growth in Mauritius, the decade of full employment and of general improvement in the living conditions of our population. We have seized this opportunity to include a component addressing disability in most of our development programmes as advocated by the United Nations in its Tallin Guidelines.

Heading our agenda of actions has been the pursuit of relentless efforts to prevent disability by the practical elimination of killer and crippling diseases. In this context, I am proud to say that scourges like poliomyelitis, leprosy, trachoma and onchocerciasis have been completely eradicated in Mauritius.

Furthermore, to limit the baneful consequences of industrialization and urbanization, which bring in their wake disabling conditions such as pollution, traffic accidents and accidents in the place of work, legislative measures like the Occupational Safety, Health and Welfare Act (1988) and the Protection of the Environment Act have been passed to ensure that safety norms are respected by enterprises, industrial concerns and places of work in general and also to prevent disability arising out of industrial and environmental pollution.

Side by side with preventive measures, we also took important steps to improve the quality of life of our citizens with disabilities by providing a wide array of social benefits. These range from the payment of a basic invalidity pension to all categories of disabled persons and a carer's allowance to those who need constant care and attention, to important tax rebates to persons with disabilities and parents of disabled children. Moreover, the Government provides free prosthetic and orthotic appliances and assistive devices such as wheelchairs, audio-prostheses, low-vision aids and walking aids are made available free of charge to disabled persons. Also, as Mauritius is a party to the Florence Agreement and Nairobi Protocol, no duties are levied on materials for blind persons, or on sports and educational equipment for persons with disabilities and assistive devices.

(Mr. Offmann, Mauritius)

In addition, our policy is geared towards upholding the dignity of the disabled person. In this context, and in consonance with ILO Convention 159, important legislative actions have been taken to provide vocational training and promote employment opportunities for our disabled citizens.

Two historic pieces of legislation - the Trust Fund for Disabled Persons Act and the Employment of Disabled Persons Act were passed in November 1988. The aim was to drive home the fact that citizens with disabilities are entitled to training and employment as a matter of right and not as an act of charity. It is worth noting that in the provision of vocational training we have adopted an innovative approach by making use of existing training institutions catering for the general population rather than creating new facilities specifically for disabled persons. This approach is not only cost-effective but also helps to promote the concept of integration. Furthermore, with the Employment of Disabled Persons Act, a measure of positive discrimination has been introduced and this has succeeded in ensuring employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in open enterprises both as white-collar and blue-collar workers.

To further promote the concept of integration, we decided to include a component of disability in all of our major programmes. Nothing illustrates this holistic approach more clearly than the blueprint prepared by the Government on the revamping of the general system of education. A master plan on education has been produced which contains an important chapter on the education of persons with disabilities and the training of regular school teachers in the education of disabled children.

In the same way, statistics on disabled persons have been collected by modifying the Statistics Act to make provision for the collection of data on disability.

(Mr. Offmann, Mauritius)

As one of the strengths of the Mauritian society is that of the strong bonds that unite family members, we have provided a package of incentives that have induced family members to look after severely handicapped persons, whose number is increasing owing to the ageing of the population and the greater survival of children.

Finally, as the World Programme of Action lays strong emphasis on the removal of the numerous architectural, transportation and communication barriers which constitute a denial of the basic rights of the individual, we are planning a series of measures to empower disabled persons and to enable their unrestricted participation in society. Large print, audiotape and braille are already commonly available for blind people and captions are regularly used on the national television for the benefit of hearing-impaired persons.

The Decade of Disabled Persons has provided an opportunity for reflection, for awareness-raising, for concerted action, for mobilization of resources and for stocktaking. The Decade has now come to an end. Many of the problems affecting disabled persons are still with us. New problems have come to add to the existing ones. New challenges are facing the world today and new issues are beckoning the international community for the years to come. I would like to cite a few of these challenges:

First, the increasing proportion of elderly persons within the population. With the dramatic increase in life expectancy, more and more people are joining the ranks of the senior citizens. The longer they live, the greater the possibility of having one type of disability or another. In fact, according to research on the phenomenon of gerontology, many elderly persons will live with Alzheimer's disease and the other complications from this will put a great strain on the social security systems and welfare services of many countries including Mauritius, which is witnessing a rapid ageing of the population.

Secondly, the growth of invisible disabilities. Cardiovascular and cerebrovascular illnesses are becoming widespread owing to the change in lifestyle, unbearable pressure at work, stress at home, the hectic pace of life, bad food consumption habits and so on. Every year, an increasing number of people are falling victim to myocardial infarctions; many of them manage to survive and spend the rest of their lives with a disability.

Thirdly, the growing number of citizens with intellectual disabilities and mental illnesses. This is one of the surprises of the surveys on disability conducted in a number of countries. We are witnessing a rise in the proportion of persons with mental disabilities. Their rehabilitation poses an important challenge. They need to be integrated into the community without being deprived of their basic rights as citizens.

Fourthly, desertification and environmental degradation, especially in Africa, which are leading to drought and widespread famine, the result of which is, obviously, an increase in the number of children and adults with different types of disabilities, resulting from malnutrition and dearth of food.

Fifthly, the scourge of AIDS, which is ravaging many countries, is the biggest challenge to the world today. Many of those who contract the disease, once their condition is known, become pariahs and are stripped of their sociological roles and become both physically and socially disabled.

Sixthly, the last point to which I should like to draw attention, is the question of ethics. With the spectacular advances in medical technology and genetic engineering, it is now possible to know whether a child will be born with a disability or not. The questions with which we shall be confronted more often are: should there be selective non-treatment? Should death be considered as a management option for them? Should life-saving surgical operations be refused those suspected of having a medical disorder? All this poses an ethical problem, as it touches the sacrosanctity of life.

To conclude, I should like to make an appeal to the international community that after the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, the issue of disability not be relegated to limbo. A new plan of action should be developed to meet the new challenges facing the world in the years to come.

Mr. FLOOD (Ireland): I am honoured to speak at this, the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, which marks the end of the first decade of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and, at the same time, seeks to define a new strategy which will bring us into the next century. It is indeed fitting that we should meet to review progress over the past 10 years and to renew our ambitions to provide for all people with disabilities the same rights and opportunities that are available to the rest of society. I have noted with interest how the overall situation in relation to people with disabilities varies from country to country, and how the priorities for future initiatives differ. However, I think that what has most impressed me is the clear determination of all members to improve the conditions and services for people with disabilities and the mutual eagerness to learn and benefit from each other's experiences.

I should like to give some details in the time available to me of the policy initiatives that have been undertaken in Ireland in the past decade and indicate generally how we see our services and conditions generally developing for people with disabilities.

In Ireland our services for people with disabilities have witnessed quite radical change in emphasis in the last decade. There is now a general policy of caring for disabled and elderly people in community-based facilities and developing appropriate support services to enable them to participate to the fullest extent possible in all the activities of community life. This is in marked contrast to the traditional approach of providing institutional-type care, which, though well motivated at the time, had the effect of setting the handicapped apart from society. Our general policy approach now is to integrate them into society to the fullest extent possible, and we see this as a necessary first step in ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all people with disabilities. Of course, we do accept that some people may not be able to cope in a community setting, and adequate facilities of a more formal nature are required to meet their needs.

These changes were stimulated by the publication of a number of Government policy reports on the development of the services. The first of these was a Government Green Paper on Services for Disabled People entitled "Towards a Full Life", which was published in 1984. It outlined Government policy in relation to the development of services for people with a disability generally. Since then there has been a separate review of the psychiatric

(Mr. Flood, Ireland)

services in a report entitled "Planning for the Future", and, in the past two years, a report of a Review Group on Mental Handicap Services entitled "Needs and Abilities" was published. These two reports will form the basis for the development of services in these areas over the next decade.

My department has just recently established a Review Group on Services for People with Physical and Sensory disabilities. The terms of reference of this group are:

> "to examine the current provision of health-care services to people with physical or sensory disabilities and to consider how they should be developed to meet more effectively their needs ..."

I look forward to a comprehensive report which will provide a blueprint for the development of services for people with physical and sensory disabilities for the next decade, and indeed beyond.

When this review is completed we will have in Ireland, as members can see, a full range of policy documents in relation to health services for people with disabilities, and I am confident that the priorities and aspirations set out in these documents will provide a sound framework for action and result in a level of service of the very highest quality for people with disabilities.

In the development of services and policies, our first priority must be to listen to, and take full account of, what disabled people themselves tell us they need - not what we, the able-bodied, perceive to be their needs. I am delighted therefore to see especially so many disabled people among us. In Ireland we have a well-established system of consultation with organisations representing disabled people, and their contribution to the development of policy and services has been enormous.

The community care approach requires a supportive network of community-based services. Last year the Government concluded an agreement with the social partners, including the employers and trade unions, called a Programme for Economic and Social Progress. This programme provides that additional resources will be made available to facilitate an appropriate mix of community and residential services for people with disabilities. The development of community-based services will be facilitated by the provision of additional paramedical services, such as physiotherapy, speech and occupational therapy, supported by vocational rehabilitation services, additional day-care centres, respite-care facilities and home-support services. Already significant additional resources have been provided under the programme for services for people with disabilities.

Of course, not all progress is dependent on increased levels of investment in new and expanded services. Much can be achieved by fostering in local communities, and indeed in the community at large, an acceptance of people with disabilities and of their right to as normal a life as possible within the community. This is particularly true of persons who have a mental handicap or a history of psychiatric illness. I am happy to say that in Ireland it is accepted practice that as far as possible such people are now maintained in local communities, and the old stigmas or taboos which were very general in our society are fast fading away. This I regard as a most necessary development and indeed a prerequisite for the general improvement of the environment for people with disabilities of whatever type or origin.

The achievement of social integration of people with disabilities is of necessity a two-way process. It requires a willingness on the part of people with disabilities to reach out into the community; equally it demands that the public is aware of the problems faced by people with disabilities and is encouraged to play its part in reaching an acceptable solution.

The attitudes of society can be manifested, in a visible sense, in the provision of support or facilities for the handicapped. However, attitudes are also manifest in the less obvious sense in the way we deal with the handicapped socially and to the extent that we may reveal prejudices or an implicit lack of understanding. There is a need therefore to pay considerably more attention to the removal of social barriers and the elimination of prejudice and negative attitudes.

Public achievements by people with disabilities are one way of breaking down the barriers. Irish people with disabilities have achieved international recognition in the field of art and literature. For example, the work of Christy Browne and Christopher Nolan has helped to provide enormous encouragement to other artists with disabilities. The film "My Left Foot" has achieved international acclaim and is a testimony to the work of Christy Browne. But perhaps more importantly, it has been a source of inspiration to others - able-bodied and disabled alike.

The last few years have witnessed, internationally, a growing realisation of the right of people with disabilities to fully share in and contribute to the economic, social, political and cultural activities of society. In Ireland it is no different. The Programme for Economic and Social Progress provides that the Government, in consultation with the organizations representing people with disabilities, will examine how best the rights of disabled people can be promoted. Consultations on this issue with disabled people's organizations has already commenced, and in the light of responses we shall be examining how best progress on this matter can be made.

One of the primary objectives of policies and programmes for people with disabilities is to ensure that they are provided with appropriate training to enable them to develop the necessary skills to play a full role in society. In Ireland there is a wide network of vocational-training centres, provided both by statutory and by voluntary organizations, which cater for approximately 7,000 disabled persons. This network is financed by a combination of State funding and aid from the European Social Fund.

The National Rehabilitation Board is a statutory body that provides specialized vocational assessment, counselling and a placement service for people with disabilities, including school-leavers. This vocational service assesses the disabled person, gives guidance and counsel on the most appropriate form of training or career choice, arranges training or further education and, where possible, secures suitable employment. During the early years at work a follow-up service is provided to assist with any problems. The vocational service works closely with health boards and with various voluntary and statutory training agencies, trade unions and employers to ensure that people with disabilities secure a fair share of the available employment.

Training is, of course, only one side of the coin. Employment is the key factor in ensuring that disabled people take their rightful place as full and equal members of society. For almost everybody work is a basic human desire, but for a disabled person work carries the additional advantage of enabling him to cast off the role of dependant that has traditionally been associated with disability and to become fully independent. The advantages of a working life go beyond its financial rewards. Work confers social status. It brings with it an opportunity for self-expression and the satisfaction of making a contribution to the economic life of the local community and, indeed, to the nation as a whole.

Securing work for our disabled remains a big challenge, not just in Ireland but throughout the world. This, however, requires the combined efforts of a range of interests, including Governments, employers, employees and trade unions, as well as the many organizations catering for people with disabilities.

In Ireland the Government is concerned to ensure that an already-disadvantaged group, such as people with disabilities, does not have to bear an excessive share of the brunt of unemployment, and it has taken a number of steps to improve employment opportunities. The Government has recently introduced a number of measures to improve employment opportunities for the people with disabilities. These include a target of doubling the numbers of handicapped persons placed annually under the Employment Incentive Scheme.

An Employment Support Scheme was recently introduced for the purpose of providing work opportunities for people with more severe handicaps, who can often be neglected when it comes to employment considerations. This scheme operates by providing subsidies to employers, having regard to the productivity of the disabled worker. There was also a significant increase in the fund for workplace aids and adaptations.

A Government Committee has recently been established to monitor the commitment given in the Programme for Economic and Social Progress to increase the numbers of disabled people employed under the public-sector quota scheme.

If persons with disabilities are to be supported in the community it is necessary that they have an adequate level of income by which to support themselves. In Ireland there are a number of income-maintenance schemes designed to assist the people with disabilities. The main income-maintenance scheme is the disabled persons maintenance allowance, which is payable subject to both medical and means tests.

There are also a number of social-insurance-based schemes, such as invalidity pension, disablement benefit and disability benefit. Persons in receipt of disabled persons maintenance allowance and invalidity pension qualify also, in certain circumstances, for a range of other benefits, such as free travel, free-electricity allowance, free telephone rental, free television licence and free fuel.

(Mr. Flood, Ireland)

In addition, there are financial-support schemes for the blind and for parents of handicapped children. A mobility allowance and motorised-transport grant may also be paid in certain situations. There is also a variety of tax-relief schemes for the handicapped, which provide for rebates of tax and excise duty paid on petrol and cars.

The special needs of physically handicapped people in their domestic environment are provided for by a grant scheme that allows for adaptations to their homes to facilitate greater independence. This scheme provides for significant structural alterations and extensions where necessary.

In addition to the grant schemes, loan assistance is provided by voluntary organizations towards meeting the cost of housing developments for handicapped persons. This scheme, which has facilitated the provision of independent-living facilities, provides a grant of up to 90 per cent of the cost of these developments.

Of course, services for people with disabilities involve a number of Government departments and agencies. I should like to refer to the significant developments that have taken place in the past decade in areas that do not come within my sphere of responsibility as Minister of State at the Department of Health.

The Department of Education provides a comprehensive range of specialized education services for the disabled. These services are tailored to the needs of children suffering from disabilities - mild or severe - relating to physical, mental, sensory or emotional performance.

Special schools are dedicated to the needs of particular clinical groups, and special classes cater for disabled pupils in the ordinary school setting

(Mr. Flood, Ireland)

where the degree of disability is such as to allow limited integration to take place. In addition to enjoying reduced pupil-teacher ratios, these special services attract increased levels of capitation grant and have access to extra funding for the purchase of specialized equipment and materials. One of the primary objectives of policies and programmes for people with disabilities is to equip them to make a practical contribution to society to the maximum extent permitted by their disabilities.

The foregoing services are further supplemented by a special visiting-teacher service, which provides back-up to children suffering from visual or hearing impairment. In addition, a home-tuition service is provided for children who, because of their disability, are unable to attend school on a regular basis.

It is Department of Education policy to encourage the integration of disabled children into ordinary schools wherever possible, and increasingly parents are opting for this approach. As a consequence, it is necessary to consider a redirection of resources in support of this trend.

Already additional resources provided under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress have facilitated an improvement in the pupil-teacher ratio in special schools, an expansion of the visiting-teacher service to embrace additional clinical groups and the deployment of resource teachers to assist disabled pupils in an integrated setting.

However, there is a need for a fundamental examination of the range and level of educational and other support services necessary in order to maximize the potential of disabled children. A Special Committee, representative of experts in the field of special education, established by my colleague the Minister for Education to make recommendations in this regard, is expected to report shortly.

(Mr. Flood, Ireland)

New building regulations containing stringent new requirements on access for disabled people were introduced last year. The new regulations include requirements that apply to common areas in apartment blocks and to all new buildings and extensions to existing buildings and provide that: at least one entrance intended for general use, preferably the main entrance, will be accessible to wheelchair users; the internal layout will enable disabled people to circulate, with full access to all parts of the building; there will be passenger lifts with suitable access for the disabled; one bedroom in 20 in each hotel and guest-house will be suitable for a wheelchair user; there will be one unisex toilet for wheelchair users in a convenient and accessible part of the building; there will be a minimum number of reserved seats in theatres, cinemas, concert halls and sports stadiums; there will be technical aids to communication in buildings used for entertainment, conferences or religion.

It is Government policy that transport providers must, on an ongoing basis, give attention to improving acessibility to transport for people with disabilities. There is a Government Transport Accessibility Committee that monitors provision and urges transport providers, who are represented on the Committee, to improve facilities.

There have been notable improvements in accessibility to public transport in recent years. The Committee has drawn up a three-year programme of action further to improve facilities. Proposals that are currently being pursued include the introduction of a pilot fixed-route wheelchair-accessible bus service in Dublin City and the introduction of wheelchair-accessible taxis. The existing arrangements for persons with mobility handicaps who use airports, air services, ports and sea transport is also being examined with a view to improving such arrangements.

From what I have said, it will be evident that we have spent a considerable amount of time and effort in Ireland over this past decade in clarifying our objectives in relation to the handicapped, in thinking out in a systematic manner how the very considerable problems faced by people with disabilities should be addressed and in putting in place what we regard as a sound platform on which to build for the future. The challenge, of course, that now faces us is in translating this basic framework into real and meaningful benefits for people with disabilities in their daily lives and in ensuring that the necessary supports are in place to ensure that every person with a handicap can have a full and satisfying place as an equal member of society.

Economically, the 1980s have been a difficult time in Ireland. We were faced with a difficult budgetary situation, which had to be corrected, we had to cope with a growing unemployment problem and we had to be prudent in our approach to ensure that the fundamentals of our economy were put on a sound footing so that we could participate fully in the movement towards the expansion and closer integration of the European Community. I am happy to say that we have made considerable progress in this regard.

All of this has meant, however, that we have not been able to increase our investment in services such as these for people with disabilities as quickly as we would otherwise have wished. It would seem to me from the contributions that I have heard so far that we in Ireland are not alone in this. Nevertheless, as I have outlined, progress had been made, and I would be fairly confident that we can now move forward with some certainty to reap the benefits of the careful groundwork that we have laid.

I was pleased to be able to attend the Council of Europe's first ministerial conference on disability, held in Paris last November, which gave renewed European impetus in this area.

I repeat that I am very happy - indeed, privileged - to be here in New York today to lend my voice and that of the Irish Government towards securing full civil rights in all walks of life for all persons, of every creed, colour and nationality, with a handicap. I accept that it is the responsibility of each of us in our countries to ensure that our own citizens with disabilities are provided every facility in order to assume their rightful place in society, but international bodies such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe can be powerful forces for change in this regard.

Finally, I congratulate the United Nations on its initiative. I am confident that our deliberations and resolutions here for these two days will reverberate around the globe and, hopefully, mark a giant step forward for our disabled brothers and sisters throughout the world towards achieving their rightful place in society.

Mr. KALLEHAUGE (Denmark): I am truly honoured to address the Assembly today on behalf of the Danish Government at this plenary meeting of the forty-seventh session, which marks the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons and the tenth anniversary of the World Programme of Action.

In the speech that I delivered in the Third Committee last year, I mentioned that in 1980 and since 1988 the Danish Government had included a representative of the organizations of persons with disabilities as a member of the Danish delegation. At the same time, Denmark urged other Member States to act in a similar way. It is a great pleasure to note that a still increasing number of Member States is following the good examples earlier set by, among others, Norway, Austria, Canada, Australia and Denmark. This policy demonstrates how disabled persons have become much more visible during the Decade, and at the same time it gives the disabled the unique chance to speak for themselves in the United Nations.

I still remember how strange it seemed to almost everybody I met in the United Nations in 1980 when I spoke in the Third Committee for the first time about the preparations for the International Year of Disabled Persons. The tremendous effect of the awareness campaigns throughout the world during the Decade is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than by the active participation of persons with disabilities that we all witness in the General Assembly today.

In politics, as well as in other human matters, no change will take place unless the attitudes of the persons involved are changed. So, even if some of us might think that 10 years is a long time to wait for people so underprivileged and marginalized as most persons with disabilities still are, in particular in the developing countries, the awareness campaigns during the Decade have been good and necessary investments. But now the time has come for the good attitudes and better understanding of our problems to bear fruit.

(Mr. Kallehauge, Denmark)

The demand for equality made by the disability movement is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Human rights are universal, and thus include persons with disabilities unrestrictedly, because people are born free and equal, and have the same inalienable rights to life and welfare, education and work, independent living and access to active participation in all aspects of society.

Any direct discrimination or other negative discriminatory treatment of disabled persons is a violation of human rights. Anyone who discriminates on the basis of disability or in other ways treats disabled persons differently than others bears the burden of proving that such treatment is objectively well-founded and not in contravention of the words and meaning of this principle.

Persons with disabilities must be guaranteed equal opportunities. Persons with disabilities have a right to compensation for their impairment. All socially generated barriers - physical, as well as financial, social and psychological - excluding persons with disabilities from full participation in society must be eliminated. The place of disabled persons is everywhere.

This philosophy leads to the following three basic principles, on which the disability movement is founded: persons with disabilities are born free and equal in dignity and rights; persons with disabilities have the right to life, liberty and personal security, like all other human beings; and persons with disabilities are entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in all United Nations declarations and other international human rights instruments, like their fellow men and women.

We are convinced that these principles are right and that they will also be universally accepted because of their ethical value. But even if nobody will dispute their validity and truth, it does not mean that these principles are generally respected. Unfortunately they are not - far from it.

Therefore we have to elaborate strategies for how to transform our good intentions into a practical day-to-day policy, leading step by step to a society for all.

The integration of disabled persons is both an objective and an instrument in the integration process. Disabled people remain invisible as long as they do not live integrated, and they cannot become integratd until they are visible. That is a paradox which is not uncharacteristic of many of the problems which we have to overcome as disabled persons. In the handicapped movement we are much too familiar with "catch 22", as Josef Heller called it in his novel bearing that title.

In the years to come, I see two main areas that will be of special importance when it comes to identifying the proper strategies for the future. One is the ongoing work in the ad hoc Open-ended Working Group established by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to elaborate standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for disabled persons. The latest report on the meetings held in Vienna in May 1992 shows good progress and also very promising results. The implementation and monitoring of the standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for disabled persons will, when they are adopted by ECOSOC next year, become one of the two main tasks in the coming years.

The other area is the increasing awareness of the human-rights aspect in the global work carried out for their members by organisations of persons with disabilities. In both these areas the United Nations and its specialised agencies have a very important role to play as the global protector of the grossly disadvantaged minority of mankind still formed by persons with disabilities.

This does not mean that the main responsibility for the welfare of the citizen does not remain with the Governments of the Member States. But even in a democracy a minority might need the moral support that the international community can offer simply by focusing on the human rights and social needs of the minority. It is the natural obligation of the United Nations to care about and, if necessary, to act on behalf of the minorities.

The World Conference on Human Rights scheduled to take place in June next year provides an excellent opportunity to review progress made in the field of human rights also in relation to persons with disabilities.

The conscience of international society has often been represented by the United Nations. We trust that the United Nations will continue to be worthy of our confidence by acting as the international agent and caretaker of the interests of persons with disabilities in close cooperation with organisations of disabled people.

Denmark recommends that access for disabled people to the labour market be made the key issue in the coming decade. This recommendation is wholeheartedly supported by the Danish organisations of persons with disabilities. The reason for this proposal is that the integration of persons with disabilities on the labour market is achieved nowhere - not in the industrialized nor in the developing world. Integration on the labour market cannot be achieved without integrating disabled people also in the education system and in most other sectors of society, especially those concerning housing, transport and communication. In a paradoxical way, access to the labour market might in different societies become the first or the final step in the integration process. Access to the labour market is of crucial importance to persons with disabilities all over the world.

In the developing countries, where social pensions are scarce or non-existent, one cannot survive without a job. If a disabled person cannot earn an income on which she or he can exist, there is no other solution than the degrading role of begging. In countries with better social pensions, it is fortunately not a question of life and death if a disabled person gets a job or not, but a question of normalization. Living a mainstream life means, among other things, that you earn your own living.

Consequently the equalization of opportunities implies that access to the labour market should be made possible for all persons with disabilities. To have a job like everybody else is good for a disabled person's self-respect as well as for the image of persons with disabilities among the population at large. Until very sophisticated social programmes are developed, independent living for disabled persons will presuppose personal wages stemming from the labour market.

No disability issue other than employment is of such importance for persons with disabilities on a global scale that it deserves to be made the focal-point of all integration efforts in the coming years. It is a good and very concrete objective. It does not demand any further explication. Everybody will immediately understand its importance. Instruments that will prove to be useful might vary from one country to another, and nobody yet knows the answer as to how it can be done most efficiently. It would, however, be a worthy competition between the Member States to report to the United Nations in the coming years as to how progress is gained in this important field of the disability work lying ahead of us.

In conclusion, I wish to express the continued need for improving the coordination of the United Nations efforts in favour of the disabled. In his next report to the Third Committee, the Secretary-General has been asked to report on United Nations co-ordination. In the opinion of the Danish Government, it will be preferable to entrust one agency with the task of coordination, in particular regarding the efforts in developing countries. In our view, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the agency of the United Nations systme that is best suited to undertake this task.

Mr. MOULTRIE (Bahamas): Commemorations are generally a time for reflection and stocktaking. As we analyse the advances made during the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons and evaluate their impact on the lives of the disabled worldwide, we can be satisfied that some progress has been made in meeting our common goals and objectives set out in the World Plan of Action concerning Disabled Persons. The specific emphasis that the Programme of Action placed on the prevention of disability, on rehabilitation and equalization of opportunity has fostered our better recognition, perception and understanding of disability. Whether a consequence of injury resulting from accidents, birth defects, disease, conflict or war, there has been a shift away from viewing disability as inability, and the disabled as a liability, towards accepting their right to care, and their importance in the pool of human resources essential to the development process.

Consequently, in many countries, including the Bahamas, persons with disabilities have been enabled to define their own interests in their own terms, whether these relate to self-directed assistance, maintaining their independence, improving their quality of life or obtaining accessible housing and other facilities for the enhancement of full community adjustment and participation. The focus of national, regional and international activities has rightly been on devising more precise, more effective and more innovative approaches to disability, to ensure that these goals and objectives can be achieved. There can be no question, then, that the Decade and the Programme of Action have brought both practical and material benefit to the disabled, and opened to them new opportunities for a better life.

It is evident, none the less, that further and continuing efforts are required for the Decade's objectives to be fully realized. Our efforts to implement the World Programme of Action and to meet the Decade's objectives were pursued in a less than favourable environment. In developing countries in particular, staggering economic and social problems have affected the ability of Governments to implement the World Programme of Action. The traditional function of the family as care-giver and support system for the disabled is being steadily eroded. Developing the accessible range of services, training the professionals and providing the technical aids to meet the varying needs of the disabled over time is weighing heavily on Governments encumbered by debt, structural adjustment and other critical socio-economic problems. Lacking the resources to underwrite these costs, Governments in developing countries face formidable problems in formulating and implementing viable and effective disability policies and programmes.

Responding effectively to the demands of the disabled and other vulnerable groups, therefore, remains a considerable challenge. Fortunately, Governments have the support and partnership not only of the disabled themselves but of a wide range of non-governmental and private voluntary organizations in formulating and implementing policies and programmes in the area of disability, from which both the disabled and society benefit. The value of the commendable services these organizations undertake on behalf of the disabled must be recognized.

The years of the Decade have also been turbulent ones, characterized by conflict within and between States, poverty, famine, drought and disease. The casualties of conflicts and the victims of preventable diseases continue to swell the ranks of the disabled. In these circumstances, efforts by the United Nations and the Secretary-General to build peace, stability and security, and particularly to address the economic and social roots of potential conflict, are relevant to the issue of disability. This is yet another reason for the Bahamas' support of initiatives in the areas of peace and security and social development. We also support the efforts of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other agencies in the areas of prevention of disability, including immunization, genetic counselling, drug and substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation, prenatal and post-natal care, sanitation, and maternal and child health.

The Bahamas does not, however, consider that there is any obstacle to the implementation of the World Programme of Action that cannot be overcome with the requisite political commitment and through international cooperation. We have ourselves continued our dedicated pursuit of the objectives of the World Programme of Action with a Decade-end "Study of the Needs of the Handicapped in the Bahama Islands", which was conducted in cooperation with a number of relevant non-governmental organizations, including the Salvation Army and Life Services for the Handicapped, a United States based non-governmental organization. The Desk for the Disabled, the lead Governmental Coordinating Agency, the Advisory Council on Disability and the Bahamas Council for the Handicapped, the umbrella organization serving disabled persons and organizations of disabled persons in the Bahamas, all provided invaluable input for the study.

The study will bring into clearer focus the unmet needs and gaps in services to the disabled, explore the role of the family as care-giver and ways and means of strengthening that role, determine how technological aids can be more quickly and inexpensively made available to the disabled, and devise modalities for statistics-gathering and improve the training of rehabilitation workers. The data produced is to assist our goal-setting in the field of disability, goals we see as not only directed at diminishing impairments, but capitalizing on remaining abilities - goals that are not simply employment-oriented, but that are intended to elicit optimal levels of functional capability from our disabled citizens, while at the same time giving due attention to those with irrevocable impairments.

The Bahamas is ready, therefore, to take up the challenge to move from awareness-raising to concrete action, with a view to creating "A Society for All" by the year 2010. We appreciate, in this regard, that Governments' efforts to translate programmes into projects that would benefit the disabled at the local and national levels must be met with concrete international support. There is much to be said for increasing the effectiveness of the United Nations in addressing the issue of disability, and indeed all social development issues. Efforts to strengthen the Social Development branch of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, including the Disabled Unit, have always had the support of the Bahamas. The Organization must be further enabled to foster consultative links with Member States that have programmes based on research findings which have been proven to be effective and to have long-term positive effects, or that have developed advanced technical aids. It should be an important source of information, analysis, technical, research and advisory services, particularly to developing countries.

Extra-budgetary resources have been essential to implement programmes in the social development area, which continues to be fundamentally affected by scarce resources. The Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons has demonstrated its worth through its vital catalytic activities to benefit the disabled, particularly in developing countries. The Bahamas will join with the Assembly in supporting the Economic and Social Council's recommendation that the Fund continue after the Decade of Disabled Persons, with revised terms of reference reflected in its proposed new name, the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability. If the Fund is to bolster national, regional and international disability activities, generous contributions would have to be made by those in a position to do so.

The Bahamas believes that this commemoration should have immediate and long-term significance. Detailed efforts are now being made to ensure that in 1993, we have in our service a comprehensive framework for maintaining the momentum in countering disability following the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. With the World Programme of Action at its centre, and the practical guidelines contained in the long-term strategy and the standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for the disabled, we should be ready to address all aspects of disability, whether they affect the individual's capacity for mobility, communication or social interaction. The Bahamas is committed to making its contribution to ensure that the momentum of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons is maintained into the twenty-first century.

Mr. KABIR (Bangladesh): At the outset, may I express my profound grief and sympathy for the brotherly people of Egypt, who have been struck by a severe earthquake, resulting in such a heavy loss of life and of property.

Civilized societies have evolved on the fundamental belief that human beings are born with equal opportunities guaranteed to all without discrimination. Social prejudices and the inadequate understanding of true human potential have, however, often blocked our paths to this cherished objective. In the process, many did not receive the attention that they deserve from society based on the principle of equality. A group that has suffered as a result is the world's disabled.

(Mr. Kabir, Bangladesh)

An estimated 500 million people in the world today suffer from physical or mental disabilities, and 80 per cent of them live in the developing countries. Social prejudices and neglect have driven a great many of them to a life of isolation and frustration and have deprived them of the basic elements of normal living conditions, which cannot but have a jarring effect on broad social harmony and social conscience.

Those of us who are fortunate enough to be able to call ourselves sound in body and mind have a collective responsibility towards our less fortunate fellow human beings to help them integrate themselves into the mainstream of society. Their problems should not be viewed with the attitude of doling out handouts of pity but with forbearance and compassion. The arbitrary decision to consign them to their fate as permanent beneficiaries of social welfare is no longer acceptable. We have a duty to help transform the disabled into productive forces by exploiting in full their potentials, however limited.

Fortunately, there is an awareness today of the need to address the issue of the disabled as a matter of common concern. At this forty-seventh session of the General Assembly, the issue of disabled persons bears particular significance, as it marks the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. We are gathered today not just to take stock of the progress of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, but to reaffirm our commitment to complete what has been left incomplete and reiterate our determination of what we can best do to strengthen our efforts for the future.

Our achievements in terms of statistics will no doubt vary from nation to nation, especially with respect to availability of funds, technical knowledge and support services. While in the developed societies commendable advancements have been possible to improve the conditions of the disabled, the situation remains critical in the developing countries, especially in the least developed ones. The efforts of developing countries to address the issue of the disabled are undertaken against formidable challenges, the most serious being the lack of adequate financial resources.

Inadequate nutritional intake and a lack of proper medical facilities account for a large number of physical deformities, among both adults and children. Political instability and violence resulting from social disorganization have added to the growing numbers of the disabled. Extreme poverty and low levels of socio-economic development have imposed severe limitations on efforts to rehabilitate disabled persons and integrate them into society. Due to poverty and lack of employment, the disabled are often driven to capitalise on their handicap by resorting to begging as a livelihood.

The democratically elected Government of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in Bangladesh is committed to the people and to bringing about a society based on social justice and equitable opportunity. Among the many challenges that lie in the way of that objective is the issue of disabled persons. Our Government is aware of the gravity of the issue and is determined to bring about improvement in the conditions of the disabled. The policies and programmes undertaken in this regard are formulated within the general guidelines of the World Programme of Action. Allow me to share with the Assembly some of the steps we have undertaken.

Equalisation of opportunity is the central theme of the World Programme. Full and equal participation of disabled persons can be achieved only through their economic independence. The Ministry of Social Welfare, which serves as our national focal point, is dedicated to imparting specialised vocational training to the handicapped and to turning the hands outstretched in begging into hands of production. To this end, the Government has undertaken various programmes in both rural and urban areas for income generation by the disabled through training- and production-oriented activities. Specialized educational institutions are being set up to cater for the special needs of the disabled. The Government has set up a centre called Employment Rehabilitation of the Physically Handicapped and a number of training and rehabilitation centres for the blind and for vision- and hearing-impaired persons. The Government, as a matter of principle, encourages community-based rehabilitation with an emphasis on self-employment and cooperative programmes. Interest-free loans are also provided to assist such persons in setting up small income-generating enterprises. It is widely recognized that there is a need to create a healthy social environment where the disabled person can live in dignity as a self-respecting individual and not as just a passive recipient of compassion and pity. In this regard, the mass media are being utilized to educate the public away from social prejudices towards the disabled. A Welfare Trust for the disabled at the national level under the Ministry of Social Welfare has been entrusted with the formulation of policies and the coordination of efforts of pertinent Government organizations and non-governmental organizations to bring about change in the attitude of the people towards persons with disabilities.

Those who are intellectually handicapped, and thereby unable to think out or articulate their needs and desires, are even more in need of special recognition. Adequate provision must be made for special care, education and training to prepare them for life in the world when their families are no longer there to protect them.

So unambiguous and total is my Government's commitment to stand by the disabled that last year Prime Minister Begum Zia personally associated herself with programmes for the welfare of the mentally handicapped by inaugurating in Dhaka the Bangladesh Institute of the Mentally Retarded. For its construction the Government provided a grant of 15.02 million taka to the Society for the Care and Education of Mentally Retarded, a leading non-governmental organization in the field. Later she also opened in Dhaka the National Complex for the training of teachers for both the physically and intellectually handicapped.

It is gratifying to note that at this stage of human civilization many of the causes of disabilities can be prevented if only proper knowledge and technology are available at the right time. In this regard our Government's programme to reform eating habits and to motivate the people to use non-traditional and inexpensive sources of nutrition has produced impressive results towards the prevention of blindness and deformation at birth. The extended programmes of immunization and primary health care have also been strengthened, with special attention given to mother-and-child health care. Family-planning programmes are also being carried out as a national priority to build healthy families.

It is, however, a sad reality that disabled women and children suffer the most as they often comprise the most vulnerable sector of the population in many countries. Bangladesh is no exception; yet we endeavour to give priority to the special needs of these groups. Bangladesh, as a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, also upholds the rights of disabled children, particularly in the field of education, training, health care and rehabilitation.

A large number of non-governmental organizations in Bangladesh, some with the participation of disabled persons themselves, are involved in projects for the prevention of disabilities and the rehabilitation of the disabled. Their

(Mr. Kabir, Bangladesh)

help and assistance have lent substantial support to our ongoing programmes. Here we acknowledge the assistance provided by friendly countries whose Governments and non-governmental organizations have helped in the area of services for the welfare of both intellectually and physically disabled persons.

The sincerity of our intent is, however, greatly overshadowed by severe constraints on our resources. The varied and complex nature of social issues that coexist in conditions of underdevelopment makes the issue of the disabled only one among many. With the issues so many and the means so few, the jugglery of choosing our priorities is indeed taxing and often painful.

(Mr. Kabir, Bangladesh)

We note with appreciation that the International Meeting on the Roles and Functions of National Coordinating Committees on Disability in Developing Countries held in Beijing in 1990, the meeting on alternative ways to mark the end of the Decade held in Finland in the same year and the recent ministerial meeting held in Montreal, have all acknowledged the problems faced by the developing world in the implementation of the World Programme of Action. Their findings and recommendations deserve our close attention.

While we acknowledge that the principal responsibility for improving the condition of disabled persons lies with national governments, international organisations must play an important role in supplementing national efforts. It is equally important to establish partnership between developing and developed countries, especially in the field of technical and economic cooperation. As noted earlier, financial constraint is the most serious obstacle to implementation of programmes for the disabled. In this regard, the developing countries should be assisted by countries of the developed world. Dissemination of information and the transfer of technology at a concessional rate to the developing countries is another area which should be addressed with priority. We also feel the need for appropriate legislation for protecting the rights of the disabled.

The World Programme of Action is designed for all nations, and the capacity of individual countries to implement it must therefore be evaluated from this point of view. The Vienna affirmative action plan formulated by the world symposium of experts on technical cooperation among developing countries and technical assistance in disability prevention and rehabilitation offers a comprehensive set of suggestions to meet challenges faced by the developing countries. Its full implementation calls for a three-way partnership among national governments, donor countries and international organisations.

We commend the very important role that the United Nations has been playing in ameliorating the conditions of disabled persons world wide. The Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, the designated focal point for coordinating programmes for the disabled within the United Nations system has our full support. I would be remiss if I did not also mention the specialized agencies, in particular the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which have been doing impressive work in the developing countries, especially in providing policy guidance and mobilising resources for activities relating to the disabled.

We believe that better coordination among the specialized agencies through the adoption of a system-wide action plan within the United Nations is an area where we should focus attention.

We welcome the decision of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), taken during its July session, to continue the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons beyond the decade under revised terms of reference. In this regard we endorse the idea contained in paragraph 13 of the Secretary-General's report (A/47/415) that the Fund should have an appropriate mix of regular and extrabudgetary resources. In the past we have seen that the Fund has suffered, as voluntary funding was not always forthcoming; and programmes run the risk of curtailment where funding is not always predictable.

As the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons draws to a close, many of its objectives remain unfulfilled. But this should not be a reason for total disappointment. The Decade no doubt has helped to bring about a change in social attitude towards the disabled and in raising awareness of their special needs. It has brought about a shift to address the issue of disabilities from a viewpoint of charity to one of empowerment. Our priority must therefore be to carry the awareness generated by the Decade into the future - from mere urgings of advocacy to concrete actions. National, regional and international efforts must focus on the development of an integrated theme to include prevention, rehabilitation, social integration and provision of equal opportunities for full participation by disabled persons in the development activities of countries. In this regard, we fully endorse the recommendation contained in the report (A/47/415) for the adoption of a long-term national action plan for the period 1993-2002, encompassing the three main elements - prevention, rehabilitation and equalisation of opportunities. As this period also coincides with the Asian-Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, recently proclaimed by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Bangladesh reaffirms its full commitment to the welfare of the disabled in the coming years.

We have seen in reviewing the Programme of Action for the Decade, that in many countries programme have been mostly urban-centric with little focus on the disabled living in rural areas. Secondly, as pointed out in the Secretary-General's report, programmes for persons with a mental disability were the weakest in many countries. Indeed we must also appreciate that intellectually or mentally disabled persons deserve a little more attention. It is our hope that these issues will be appropriately addressed in our future programmes of action. I would also like to suggest that as we go beyond the Decade of Disabled Persons, we must reconsider and speak of them as persons with disabilities rather than as disabled persons, as with a little help from us many of them can and do function as able persons.

The goals we seek will remain elusive unless the underlying issues of poverty and underdevelopment are overcome. The profound developments in present-day international relations have thrown open rare opportunities for international cooperation to address this basic and vital issue of the welfare of persons with disabilities. We sincerely hope that the hands of cooperation will not shrink on the grounds of insular policies and deny us the long-cherished opportunity to change our lot.

In standing on the threshold of a new century, we hold a vision of hope. There are enough reasons to believe that we will not be pursuing an illusion to establish a society for all by the year 2010 if we have the political will to do so.

Mr. WEBSON (Antigua and Barbuda): Antigua and Barbuda join with the rest of the world community of nations in applauding the efforts of the United Nations in the Decade of Disabled Persons. We are honoured to be part of the discussion that evaluates the activities of that Decade.

I come from a part of the world that is so beautiful that millions of people leave distant lands by air and by sea to feast their eyes on our region's beauty. The Caribbean's beauty is legendary; yet many thousands of us do not have the chance to see the physical beauty of our region because we cannot see. Many thousands of us do not have the chance to enjoy the pulsating rhythm for which we are so famous because we do not hear, and yet many more because of barriers cannot enjoy the brilliant country we live in. Nevertheless I can attest to the inner beauty of my countrymen, who understand the need to make all hands useful in the development process of our country.

(Mr. Webson, Antigua and Barbuda)

Making possible the contribution of disabled people in my small Caribbean-island developing country is an important policy consideration. And yet, even in my Antigua and Barbuda, so much remains to be done.

In 1992, as we evaluate the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, I should like to offer selected snapshots of the Decade's significant achievements. I shall also recount some of its shortcomings, and I shall briefly look at some of the considerable challenges that lie ahead for disabled persons.

Undoubtedly, the major achievement of the Decade was increased understanding and knowledge of disability issues among policy makers, planners, service-providers, parents and disabled persons ourselves. Increased media coverage, public awareness campaigns and commemorative events focused on people with disabilities and contributed positively to a greater acceptance of society's responsibility to remove obstacles to full participation for disabled persons. Such obstacles include prejudice and discrimination, all of which result from social and cultural factors.

Throughout the Decade disabled persons and our many organisations successfully increased our influence. In some places, we gained new respect in our communities as we achieved greater independence. In other places, legislation and the machinery of the State worked to improve our material conditions and to increase our access to community resources.

Within the past decade in my country, for example, all blind and visually-impaired children have been integrated into the regular school system. We have also expanded the services offered by the school for the hearing impaired. Through the efforts of disabled people in Antigua and Barbuda, a council for the handicapped has been established; it has succeeded

(Mr. Webson, Antigua and Barbuda)

in persuading the Department responsible for the census to include the disabled as a category in its census-taking.

Several teachers of the blind and visually-impaired and of the hearing-impaired have been trained abroad and in our Caribbean region. A programme has been established and supported for the mentally retarded, and through our school system we have established activities to incorporate the needs of the learning-disabled individual. The Government of Antigua and Barbuda has continued to pay attention to the needs of the adult blind population, through its support for its industrial workshop, which has been in existence for more than 40 years.

These incremental improvements are the direct result of resolution 37/53, of December 1982, proclaiming these past 10 years the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons.

Positive achievements in some places have been overshadowed by certain grim realities in others. There is continued debate over defining disability; the confusion of the definition does not, however, detract from the fact that in war-stricken countries and those affected by famine the number of disabled persons - of obviously disabled persons - has increased dramatically. Today it is estimated that 500 million people, the equivalent of 6 per cent to 10 per cent of the world's population, have been identified as having one or more disabilities. Of these people, 160 million are women and 140 million are children. Moreover, it is estimated that 300 million people with disabilities live in developing countries and that less than 10 per cent have access to basic health and education services and adequate sanitation.

As populations grow, as poverty spreads, as famine and armed conflicts explode, the developing world is faced with the alarming prospect of

(Mr. Webson, Antigua and Barbuda)

significant increases in our disabled population. Severely disabled persons - those with physical and sensory disabilities and many others, including the wheelchair-bound - will account for a significant percentage of the increase in the number of disabled persons brought about by human tragedy not of their making, but, rather, resulting from the actions of many of their countrymen, over which we have no control. In addition to becoming victims of overpopulation, poverty, famine and wars, marginally healthy disabled persons will be attacked by diseases, and many of them will die of causes not of their own making.

Unemployment will also attack the dignity and independence of an overwhelming number of disabled persons. The disabled remain among those groups with the highest rates of unemployment in our world today, and this matter must be given significant consideration. Unemployment among disabled persons may have persisted because of discrimination in hiring and the lack of training and special education. Disabled persons will be largely unable to find employment if this situation continues, even at the end of our Decade.

A strategy to end our unemployment plight might begin with the disabled child. Social services and training reaching out to the parents of disabled children, embracing the disabled child and the disabled young adult, would greatly enhance personal development. The overwhelming need for training is most apparent at the end of the Decade. Official development assistance offered by developed countries and through United Nations agencies could focus more closely on the needs of the disabled during the post-Decade period. Such a strategy would help in bringing disabled persons into the mainstream of our societies.

(Mr. Webson, Antigua
and Barbuda)

The Decade of Disabled Persons, with all its promise, was caught in a world that has seen some of the most significant political changes in our time. History will probably record the end of the cold war, the dismantling of an empire, and the reduction of the threat of nuclear war as the most rapid, most dramatic and critical changes ever to take place in a single decade. These welcome changes, however, not only diverted the world's attention and shifted the focus away from the disabled, but they succeeded in moving critical fiscal resources to other segments of the world's population. The promise to set aside resources for the disabled, in concert with our needs, has not been fulfilled.

The challenge of refocusing attention and economic resources is now the new goal. We are cognizant of the economic problems which now beset our world and the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor will exacerbate the conditions of disabled persons in developing countries. We are aware that disabled persons need new alliances if we are to strengthen our cause. Disabled persons will reach out to women, to minorities and to the aged, confident that together we can collectively influence national governments and the international community.

The conclusion of the Decade of Disabled Persons offers the opportunity for a renewed commitment on the part of the international community to the objectives of the Decade's Programme of Action. There is a need for new and additional financial resources and institutional arrangements to move the disability programme from the level of awareness to action.

At the national level, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda is pledged: first, to undertake a comprehensive review of its policies, programmes and support services for nationals with disabilities in the post-Decade period;

secondly, to develop a comprehensive and coherent policy to further the integration of disabled persons into the mainstream of our society; thirdly, to establish and strengthen a national coordinating mechanism to monitor and oversee the implementation of the action plan for the disabled; and, fourthly, to explore the possibility of establishing within the legislative body a standing committee on the status of disabled persons and a procedure for annual reporting on the progress made in implementing the plan of action.

While much has been achieved over the Decade, it is obvious that the goal of full and equal participation is far from realization. However, the equalization of opportunity is an ideal towards which all nations must strive.

The year 1992 marks the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons; it does not mark the end of disabilities. Yet, this period has laid the foundation for further action to ameliorate the effects of disabilities. Antigua and Barbuda sees 1992 as a transition year in which we take stock of what has been learned during the Decade. Now is the time to build upon the awareness raised throughout the Decade. Now is the time to put new approaches into practice, and to turn this moment in history into an opportunity for the further integration of all disabled persons into society.

This is the challenge. This is the goal. The expansion of services, the broadening of alliances of disabled groups and the elimination of preventable causes of disability: this will guide us into the future.

Mr. WOZNIAK (Poland): The year 1992 marks the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. The delegation of Poland considers it appropriate to evaluate the progress and failures in the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons.

(Mr. Wozniak, Poland)

In our opinion, the main obstacle to the success of the Decade is the lack of national coordinating machinery for the implementation of the World Programme in many countries. Insufficient information and outdated concepts with regard to dealing with disability still prevail. Nevertheless, much has been achieved in the course of the Decade, especially by building on the awareness raised throughout the last ten years.

Environmental pollution, technical advancement, all kinds of stress, various addictions and other situations created by the fast pace of living are responsible for the formation of new groups of disabilities. On the other hand, in developing countries and in countries in transition many situations arise that result in disabilities in people owing to the insufficiency of social care.

This is so in different regions of the world and it is a complex problem. There are different kinds of disabilities in proportion to the level of development in specific regions or countries.

A great part of the responsibility for this situation is to be placed upon the people who take decisions concerning the fate and situation of the disabled. Since the second half of 1989 my country has begun to introduce comprehensive, fundamental and structural reforms and to put into practice market economy mechanisms. Despite well-known economic difficulties, we have taken some concrete steps in favour of disabled people. For example, according to the provisions of the Act of Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation of the Disabled, issued by the Polish Parliament on 9 May 1991, a new institution - the Government's Plenipotentiary for the Disabled - has been established at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The tasks of the Plenipotentiary for the Disabled include, in particular: first, the preparation of policy guidelines in the field of employment, rehabilitation and the working conditions of the disabled; secondly, the coordination of the Government's activities carried out for the benefit of the disabled; thirdly, the expression of opinions on draft legislative acts concerning the employment, rehabilitation and living conditions of the disabled; and, fourthly, the periodical survey of the implementation of regulations in the field of employment and rehabilitation of the disabled.

The Act under consideration has provided for the establishment of the State Rehabilitation Fund for the Disabled. The resources of the Fund will be used to support medical, social and vocational rehabilitation of the disabled, and in particular: first, to create new workplaces and adapt existing ones for the disabled; secondly, to organize training and retraining courses for the disabled; thirdly, to construct and modernize establishments serving the vocational, medical and social rehabilitation of the disabled; fourthly, to create sheltered workshops and appropriate activities; fifthly, to create rehabilitative and social infrastructures; sixthly, to obtain additional financing of bank-credit interest; and, seventhly, to grant loans.

As can be concluded from the above considerations, the Act of Employment and Rehabitation of the Disabled and the post of Plenipotentiary for the Disabled, as well as the State Rehabilitation Fund, are the main instruments of the Government's employment policy for the disabled. Moreover, promoting the position of Plenipotentiary to the level of the Council of Ministers is actually under consideration.

My Government recognizes the very important role of the non-governmental organizations. Every significant regulation and decision that is made in Poland concerning disabled persons is arrived at in consultation with the appropriate non-governmental organizations and trade unions.

It is obvious that the goal of full equalization of opportunities for the disabled is far from being realized. However, the United Nations and its specialized agencies provide a good conceptual basis for effective national policies, and it is very useful to implement these United Nations guidelines.

In conclusion, in marking the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, my Government has drawn up the draft of the Charter of Rights of the Disabled, which is to be adopted soon by the Polish Parliament. This Charter comprises 14 basic rights for the disabled, and we hope that it will improve the situation of this group of people in our society.

Mr. O'BRIEN (New Zealand): The marking of the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons is indeed one of the important events of this session of the General Assembly, and to have participated in it is a special experience on the personal level. New Zealand attaches special priority to offering a contribution to this meeting, along with members and representatives of the disabled community, many of whom, as we have witnessed, have had to surmount not merely the barriers of geographic distance to be here today. The New Zealand Minister of Social Welfare, the Honourable Jenny Shipley, and the New Zealand Minister of Health, the Honourable Simon Upton, regret that it has not proved possible for them to be present here today, but they have asked me to extend their greetings to all present and to congratulate those who have been in the forefront of the United Nations efforts.

(Mr. O'Brien, New Zealand)

Reforms which have taken place in New Zealand have received special impetus as from the 1981 International Year of Disabled Persons. The New Zealand Government acknowledges the strong role undertaken by non-governmental organizations in this whole effort, often in partnership with the Government. New Zealand wishes all success for the two days of discussion that we are now experiencing and it will study the results and proposals for ongoing activity with determined interest.

The New Zealand Disabled Persons Assembly is very proud that Rehabilitation International at its 1992 World Congress in Nairobi accepted the Assembly's invitation to come to New Zealand for the World Congress in 1996. The President, Ms. Marilyn Baikie, looks forward to welcoming delegates in New Zealand, who will share with others the programmes they have developed to kindle enthusiasm, energy and innovation.

The practice whereby the United Nations declares decades dedicated to special issues - for example, in respect of racism, disarmament and drug abuse - plays a real part in raising international awareness about particular issues. And the Decade of Disabled Persons has unquestionably improved public understanding of disability issues and spurred initiatives by Governments. Action at the global level needs to be complemented by regional action, and New Zealand is particularly proud to be a sponsor of the Asia and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, to go from 1993 to the year 2002. We hope that activities undertaken during this Decade will result in a strengthening of this important region's national disability programmes and policies.

Awareness is, of course, one thing and action is another. We are conscious, as many speakers before me have said, that over the Decade the

(Mr. O'Brien, New Zealand)

number of people with disabilities has increased to 500 million, as a consequence of disease, famine, malnutrition, poverty, war and violence; that financial constraints are ever present; and that armed conflict - one of the primary causes of disability - has increased in several regions of the world. The achievements of the Decade are many, but the need for more to be accomplished is clearly spelled out in the Secretary-General's report.

It is right that the Secretary-General has recommended that Governments give appropriate priority to disability issues within their programmes of assistance and technical cooperation. For New Zealand its official development assistance programme provides the mechanism through which New Zealand can lend practical support internationally to efforts to meet the needs and aspirations of peoples with disabilities. And because our official development assistance programme is designed and implemented on a cooperative basis with recipient country partners, new Zealand remains receptive to requests for assistance of direct benefit to the disabled. In fact, one of the specific principles underpinning our programme is that it should safeguard the interests of vulnerable groups and increase their capacity to contribute to development.

Medical treatment schemes, for example, are an integral part of our cooperation under existing health assistance programmes in the South Pacific, where the major part of our development effort is focused. These schemes enable us to supply expert personnel, who provide corrective surgery and quality-of-life assistance. More generally, too, our support contributes to capacity-building and institutional strengthening, which enable partner Governments to improve services to their citizens, including people with disabilities.

On the other side of the same coin, New Zealand has over many years accepted for resettlement numbers of refugees sponsored by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Each year specific provision is included for a number of refugees with medical disabilities.

Our task here is partly to take stock of the past 10 years, and I should like, very briefly, to give an overview of developments in New Zealand as our Decade draws to a close. The number of individuals in New Zealand who have disabilities to the extent that they require help with their day-to-day living comprises 3.3 per cent of our population of 3.6 million. A little over half have age-related disabilities, reflecting New Zealand's increasingly ageing population. Another 20 per cent have physical or sensory disabilities, the same proportion have psychiatric disabilities, and 10 per cent have intellectual disabilities.

Women make up 40 per cent of New Zealanders with disabilities, although, because women live longer, they make up a higher proportion of those with age-related disabilities. Impaired mobility - often arthritis - is the most common disability for women, while for men it is sensory impairment.

(Mr. O'Brien, New Zealand)

A most significant trend over the past 10 years has been the empowerment of New Zealanders with disabilities. The International Year and its ensuing Decade fostered a new awareness that provides the groundwork for this. Effective representation by people with disabilities of their own interests, collectively and individually, has led to a strengthening of partnership with Government. This, in turn, has resulted in Government policies and the services available to people with disabilities being developed in new ways. There is now a shared aim of improving the quality of life of people with disabilities and encouraging independent living.

The establishment of a Disabled Persons' Assembly is an innovative step. That Assembly brings together representatives of many New Zealanders with disabilities, some service-providers and some non-governmental organizations. In representing the interests of these groups to the Government, it helps to set policy and to establish programmes for people with disabilities.

Over the Decade non-governmental organizations in New Zealand have increasingly taken responsibility for the delivery of support services to people with disabilities. They receive substantial Government funding for this work. Another innovation is that in many areas it is the recipients of services who provide the quality-control mechanisms. For example, people with intellectual disabilities and their parents monitor and evaluate the support services they receive.

In the area of disability support services the emphasis is now on supporting independent lifestyles and work opportunities. This is reflected in, for example, the employment field, with the move, over the Decade, away from the provision of work opportunities in sheltered workshops to an emphasis on tailoring vocational-training services to the individual's needs. Such services now range from day-activity programmes to supported-employment programmes with commercial employers.

Sport as recreation is a distinctive feature of life in New Zealand. In addition to the exceptional performance of the 14-member team of young New Zealand athletes at the recent Paralympics in Barcelona, there are those who participate more than convincingly in open competition. New Zealand athletes requiring the use of a wheelchair train for and take part in open tennis competitions. A new sport known as mini-twelve sailing is another in which people with disabilities are able to take part in open competition.

Equalization of opportunities is the keystone. It constitutes a central theme of the Programme of Action, necessitating, in the words of the Secretary-General,

> "the adoption of policies and mechanisms to break down the barriers to full participation and put in place those measures necessary to facilitate effective participation." (A/47/415, para. 69)

I shall mention some of the main developments in New Zealand that are relevant here. In the field of education there is greater emphasis on mainstreaming and the development of appropriate education services, while more specific services for some disability groups, such as the profoundly deaf, have also been developed. Improved vocational services have created better opportunities for people to enter open employment. The promotion of infrastructures supporting improvements in access to public facilities has served to promote independence and self-reliance. There is Government income support for many people with disabilities and direct assistance to cover such costs as respite care for their families, some home alterations, aids and appliances and attendance for disability-related medical treatment, as well as loans to buy cars.

The most recent reforms, announced last month, concern the integration of funding for disability support services with health funding. The growing cost of disability support services, and the need for them to be carefully targeted, prompted the Government to embark on an extensive consultation exercise to define and decide the options for reform. The aim was not to cut funding, but to make the available resources more flexible and more responsive to people's needs.

The Government has now decided that over the next few years responsibility for purchasing support services for people with disabilities will gradually be drawn together under one new agency. Currently this responsibility is shared between three agencies. The new system will be required to demonstrate positive attitudes to people with disabilities and to be community-based and consumer-driven, accountable and flexible enough to respond to people's needs.

The value of specific legislation to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities has, we believe, been demonstrated in New Zealand. Our State Services Act requires all State employers to develop and implement programmes to promote equal employment opportunities. Approximately 15 per cent of all people employed in the public sector - the State sector - are identified as having a disability, and it makes sense to ensure that these people, alongside all other employees, are enabled to perform their jobs to their full potential. For the last three years the public service has run a disability-pride month to raise awareness of the employment issues for people with a disability. This has culminated in an award for the best workplace initiative.

In the private sector, the adoption of equal employment opportunity plans is voluntary. But here too it is simply good business for employers to widen their recruitment policies to attract people from diverse backgrounds and to treat equitably those people they already employ. This includes people with disabilities. Often simple adjustments can be made to working methods or to the working environment.

The benefits to an organization can be considerable. Staff with disabilities can bring a different and beneficial perspective to a wide range of issues. Disability access for employees may improve business by providing ease of access for customers. An employer may also obtain advantage through improved perceptions, on the part of clients and the employment market, that the organization is a good employer.

Finally, New Zealand proposes to promote the rights of people with disabilities by means of draft legislation amending its domestic Human Rights Commission Act. This will prohibit discrimination on the grounds of physical, mental and psychiatric disability. The amendment enjoys broad support from all political parties in the New Zealand Parliament. It is planned that it will be enacted in the period ahead.

These meetings to mark the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons are special. We can take satisfaction in the Decade's achievements. We should pay tribute to all those who have worked for its success. But it is also a time for commitment to the removal of the remaining barriers and obstacles that prevent people with disabilities from participating fully in society. New Zealand is wholly committed to doing this.

Mr. MIFSUD-BONNICI (Malta): On behalf of the Government and people of Malta, I wish to convey my deepest sympathy to and solidarity with the Government and people of Egypt on their recent tragedy.

Since its very beginning, the United Nations has recognized and has been aware of the developmental and humanitarian issues related to the growing needs and problems of the disabled all over the world. It has also recognized that modernization and higher living standards will eventually bring about a change in norms, modes and attitudes, which will in turn have a bearing on the personality and role of the disabled in society.

The upsurge of interest by the international community in the conditions of the disabled is reflected in various resolutions and declarations adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. The specialized agencies of the United Nations have also given priority consideration to the question of the disabled and have a long record of work carried out related to disability. All these efforts culminated in the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and the Decade of Disabled Persons.

The effective measures recommended in the World Programme of Action may be broadly classified under four headings: first, prevention of disability; secondly, rehabilitation; thirdly, opportunities for the disabled equal to those of the whole population, as well as an equal share in the improvement of living conditions; and, lastly, full participation of the disabled in the country's social life and development.

Disabled persons, like other citizens, are entitled to a decent living, adequate education and work opportunities. In Malta these undeniable rights are guaranteed in the Constitution. Through its strategies, my Government aims at securing the fullest possible degree of integration for the disabled into Maltese society. Solidarity within the various strata of society is strongly believed to be the most effective means to overcome the barriers that handicap the disabled and marginalize them from the rest of society.

Sensitive to the needs of the disabled, and fully aware of the problems that could emanate therefrom, the Government has over the past years formulated and implemented policies that contribute substantially to the care and support of the disabled. Government efforts to promote full participation of disabled citizens in all respects are being significantly complemented by the services provided by a number of voluntary organizations, foremost among which are the institutions of the Roman Catholic Church.

Acknowledgement of the need to rationalize the use of available resources and to promote cooperation and coordination between the main service providers led to the setting up, in November 1987, of a National Commission for the Disabled. This Commission, with representation of the relevant Government Departments of Welfare, Social Security, Labour, Education, Health and Social Housing, officials from the Federation, parents of disabled children, disabled persons and medical and paramedical personnel, is responsible for promoting public awareness with regard to the disabled and for disseminating any relevant information. Moreover, it aims at increasing opportunities for the continued involvement of the disabled in all facets of social life. The specific aims and objectives of this autonomous body are: first, to ensure the implementation of Government policies vis-à-vis the disabled individual, his family and voluntary organizations; secondly, to ensure coordination and cooperation between the relevant Government departments in the implementation of objectives prepared in the Government's plan of action in this field and those recommendations made by the Commission itself; thirdly, to maintain close contact and communication with voluntary organizations; fourthly, to identify the needs of disabled persons, their families and organizations and to take the necessary steps to see that such needs are met through the appropriate centralized services; and, lastly, to follow up new initiatives coming from within it, as well as those suggested by persons concerned in this field, and carry out the necessary feasibility studies.

The Commission has established a structure that should enable it to attain its objectives, which are basically congruent to the recommendations made in the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and in connection with the Decade of Disabled Persons. This structure includes the setting up of 15 subcommittees that focus their activity on specialized fields, thus ensuring to a considerable degree that every effort is made to meet the Commission's mandate in any particular specialized area. The Commission's activities over the past months clearly reflect full recognition of the fact that the family environment is the one best suited to the lifestyle of the disabled, as well as awareness of the pressure which certain demands made by a disabled person may in turn exert on the other family members.

It is indeed noteworthy that the Government has taken action on a number of recommendations made by the Commission for the Disabled.

There is a wide range of special medical facilities, including prevention programmes, together with financial benefit entitlements, substantial rebates on import duty payable on cars, and total exemption from the payment of road tax on specialized vehicles for disabled drivers. All these are measures that were conceived with the primary aim of promoting self-independence and social integration for those members of society who, because of their disability, may very easily find themselves marginalized.

There is a wide range of special medical facilities and services benefiting the disabled. Among the preventive measures taken to reduce the incidence of disability, screening for thyroidism has been started on all new-born babies. Around 14 months of age, children are given the triple vaccination against mumps, measles and rubella. In order to enable the earliest possible detection, diagnosis and immediate necessary curative and remedial intervention, an "at-risk register" for new-born babies with disabilities has been introduced. Last year a Child Development Advisory Unit was set up to carry out a multidisciplinary assessment of disabled children. This multidisciplinary team would then advise and counsel the child's parents and would thus also serve as a resource centre on matters relating to the disabled. Rehabilitation services include the free provision of technical and mobility aids, as well as physiotherapy, speech therapy and occupational therapy sessions in Government health centres.

Existing policies have been reviewed so as to meet the actual needs of the disabled individual. Social security provisions have been amended so that now a disabled person in receipt of a pension can still take up paid employment without forfeiting the right to a pension once the income so derived does not exceed the national minimum wage.

The environment is an important element that can further accentuate a disability by creating a social handicap. Housing is undoubtedly a prime factor in this respect. Adequate and accessible housing facilities contribute considerably towards making it possible for disabled persons to have an independent life. In recognition of this, the Government of Malta gives

(Mr. Mifsud-Bonnici, Malta)

preferential consideration to families with disabled members when it comes to the allocation of subsidized plots of land or the award of ground-floor apartments provided under Government housing schemes. Moreover, the Department of Social Housing allocates grants to disabled persons in order to help them undertake improvements to their residence, such as the installation of a lift or stair-lift facilities.

Another major area of concern that requires our immediate attention is accessibility to the surrounding environment. Through the recently approved Structural Plan, my Government has ensured that new buildings are accessible to all, and every attempt is being made to improve accessibility to existing public buildings.

However, decent accommodation on its own does not necessarily fulfil the needs of a disabled person. Therefore, housing provisions had to be complemented by such community strategies as the Home Care/Help Scheme and the special telephone lifeline provided under the Telecare Service, which are all designed to give the necessary care and support to the person concerned, as well as to his care providers.

(Mr. Mifsud-Bonnici, Malta)

The need to provide support for those who provide care has also been met through the setting up of a respite centre where disabled children benefit from rehabilitative and leisure activities that are specifically organized for them, while their relatives are given essential periodic relief from the strenuous task of caring for them. The establishment of this foundation for respite care services is a further expression of the principle of helping disabled persons achieve the utmost level of participation while at the same time enhancing and strengthening the quality of life of their families.

Education is an indispensable asset at all levels. A disabled child can never be denied the right to adequate education as this is a further investment in his or her future independence as an adult. Special schools are designed to meet the educational needs of children having special difficulties of a physical, mental, sensory or psychological nature. Once these children complete their edcuation they may choose to attend training centres that provide remedial and vocational individual educational programmes in art, woodwork, bookbinding, cane-knitting, the making of soft toys, dressmaking and crochet. Such rehabilitation programmes are designed to promote independent living and the possibility of engaging in gainful employment.

Employment possibilities for disabled persons is another target we have set and aspire to achieve. The Government, together with the National Commission for the Disabled and voluntary organizations, has established the first computer laboratory with the aim of training and consequently helping physically disabled persons to find suitable employment.

The Disablement Resettlement Unit has been set up to assure proper implementation and to advise on the improvement of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1969, which, among other things, made provisions for the keeping of a special employment register for disabled persons and required employers to employ a quota of these registered unemployed disabled persons.

As another measure designed to enhance self-sufficiency, the Social Aid Fund has been set up to award grants, out of specifically allocated public funds, to help disabled persons acquire technical aids. Moreover, should the amount required exceed the grant provision ceiling, recommendations are made to a commercial bank for the issue of a loan at a reduced rate of interest.

The effectiveness of existing policies and the introduction of new strategies depend heavily on our ability to understand the changing needs of the disabled individual as dictated by constant social and economic changes. Research programmes are believed to be the best monitors of met and unmet needs, of specified and unspecified wants, as well as a database for the planning of future policies.

The University of Malta is conducting one such research programme for disabled children attending special schools, with the aim of having a comprehensive assessment of each child and a solid foundation on which to build a rehabilitation programme for each individual.

The findings of the extensive national survey organized by the National Commissioin for the Disabled are being processed. Once this exercise is completed, the Commission will be in a better position to assess and analyse the extent of the various actual as distinct from assumed needs of those falling within the parameters of its responsibility, namely the disabled.

It is encouraging to note that the Maltese people are becoming more cognizant of the fact that the issue of disability does not merely ask for care provision but for the involvement and participation of the disabled within the community. Such an acknowledgement should prove to be a sound foundation that would ultimately give the disabled the opportunity to develop their personality in a dignified and respected manner. Only when the able-bodied radically change their attitude towards the disabled do we really cease to handicap the disabled. This should be our challenge for the years to come.

There was great satisfaction for me and for all those who attended the first meeting of the International Conference of Ministers responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities, held in Montreal last week. The political will of all those present to achieve full participation and integration of the disabled in society was paramount. May all of us translate words into action so that we will achieve the common goal we are all aiming for.

Mrs. OTTOLINA (Venezuela) (interpretation from Spanish): I feel deeply moved to be able to participate in this important forum of nations, whose main purpose earns it the title of forum of love for humanity.

The very fact that the world parliament is opening its doors and devoting two full days to discussion at special meetings of the General Assembly attests to the achievements of the Decade of attention that the world has given to the disabled. It is most encouraging to know that everything is important to all nations everywhere. If something has been achieved in the Decade of the Disabled, it is the removal of barriers and working together to increase awareness, thereby ensuring the integration of the disabled.

Something has been done - perhaps a great deal, but a great deal still remains to be done.

In these discussions we have learned about the tremendous achievements that have been made in some countries, and we have also heard about the tremendous needs that other nations confront. Thanks to this invaluable

(Mrs. Ottolina, Venezuela)

exchange of information, we will be able to decide upon joint future action that can effectively reach the broad population of disabled that remain on the margin of society because of society's deficiencies.

Here I should like to emphasize that we are not the ones who are disabled. No! It is societies that are unable to respond to unexpected needs that are disabled. We must not forget this.

Major efforts must be made to transform cities and to educate societies, to ensure that in their development they can utilize the immense value locked away in the hearts and souls of those who are now unjustly marginalized.

It is important for all of society to be able to capitalize on the great potential of these human beings. Common knowledge recognizes the courage, the strength of will, the efforts, and the spirit of struggle and self-improvement that mark the life and existence of the disabled.

I am a member of the Venezuelan Parliament, and this requires from me greater responsibility and a greater commitment: to incorporate my country into the challenge that humankind has set itself, to contribute resolutely to taking initiatives and finding effective solutions that will maximize the capabilities of so many people - people who are tremendously qualified to participate in the wonderful adventure that this world offers. The secret of the origin of the universe is being deciphered thanks to the talents of a man who has flown very far, farther than anyone, and who, from the immobility of his wheelchair, has ventured to go forward and explore the cosmos. This is a person whom the Earth still refers to as disabled: Stephen Hawkings, a universal example.

Great efforts are being deployed in Venezuela. I must state proudly and yet with a touch of sadness that we have begun for the first time to enact legislation for the advancement and integration of disabled persons. I say this with pride because we have done so, and with sadness because I acknowledge the fact that this is but a small step. A written law is not enough. The real process of integrating the disabled requires that society itself arrive at the realization that we are all equal and that we all have the same rights. We must move into the area of equality of opportunity, and we have begun this process.

In that connection, I would like to pay tribute to the tremendous effort that was made on 8 and 9 October last by Mr. Robert de Cotret, Secretary of State of Canada, who, with the support of his Government, convened an unprecedented meeting in Montreal. Seventy-six Ministers attended, and the countries there present agreed to make joint and continual efforts to take measures aimed at establishing suitable mechanisms that would make possible the most important thing of all: to help us help ourselves.

(Mrs. Ottolina, Venezuela)

With this kind of good will, with the good will of the United Nations and with all of you who are here representing the political will of our respective nations, I believe that the time has come, not to celebrate the conclusion of the Decade of Disabled Persons, but rather to begin a joint and sustained effort for decades to come.

I must emphasize as an example that in the hospitable city of Montreal, whose high level of culture was reflected in its ability to respond to the various needs of those of us who required particular attention, I definitely felt less disabled, less limited - entirely integrated. Thank you, Canada.

There are millions of people who do not have the privilege of knowing of this progress and whose lives are wasted, spent in dark despair, because no one could or knew how to help them, or, what is even worse, because they did not have the means to pay.

It is on behalf of those people that I should like to plead today. It is because of them that the world is meeting here, so that in the near future - the very near future, we hope - absolutely no one will be denied the opportunity and the right to live a full and dignified life without being subjected to the cruelty of having that denied them simply because of a lack of resources. I am convinced that the capabilities and the will to accomplish something in that respect exist here.

Nothing, absolutely nothing, is more beautiful than seeing a smile on the face of a disabled person who now feels capable, because that is the smile of a person who has won, who has conquered life - the smile of a winner. If it is in our capacity to give that person such a smile, let us do so.

The essential values of a human being transcend the world of the physical body and are intact in the spirit, in the mind and in the soul. They are there for those who seek to find them. No disability whatsoever exists that can prevent or hinder that search. Quite to the contrary: that search frequently becomes the key par excellence to open the way to that world - a far better world.

I wish to bear witness to the fact that one can succeed, that one can be happy. One can with integrity and dignity walk in the world with something other than legs. But I must acknowledge that this can be accomplished only with a little bit of help from all our friends.

Thank you for your participation, thank you for your obvious concern and very great thanks for your attention.

Mr. BHAGAT (India): I should like to begin by expressing my profound grief at the terrible earthquake that has struck Egypt, and I send the Indian delegation's sympathy to its disaster-stricken people.

(Mr. Bhagat, India)

I deem it a privilege to address the United Nations General Assembly during these special plenary meetings marking the conclusion of the Decade of Disabled Persons. At the outset, I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report contained in document A/47/415.

Developing countries like India cannot escape the grim reality that up to half a billion people around the world are disabled and that over 80 per cent of those people are in the developing world. As has often been the case in situations of grave social concern on a global scale, the United Nations has not only played a pioneering role, but has also given leadership to Governments and non-governmental organizations to take a special interest in the welfare of the disabled. The observance of the Decade of Disabled Persons has served to focus attention on this matter of global concern.

Today, although there is a growing awareness of the need to integrate the disabled fully into the social mainstream, it is unfortunate that in many societies they still face prejudice, largely due to ignorance. In fact, they have an important contribution to make to society, since the disabled are often highly acute and have above-average sensitivity and intelligence in areas where they suffer no disability. They can provide extremely useful inputs for humanity as a whole. Moreover, like other citizens, they are entitled to the full enjoyment of human rights.

The General Assembly in 1982 adopted a World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and an initial time-frame within which to implement it. This has now been extended. As noted in the Secretary-General's report, social and economic factors closely determine a society's behavioural patterns towards its less fortunate members. Therefore, unless social and economic conditions improve significantly, legislation alone will not help in the betterment of the lives of the disabled. It is therefore not surprising that the achievement of the ambitious objectives of the Programme of Action has been slow.

The United Nations Decade has, however, led to the adoption of policies in many countries and has forged international cooperation for the assistance of the disabled, while taking into consideration the particular needs of individual countries. The need of the hour is not just greater awareness and understanding of this pervasive and often tragic problem, but the will to act. This is especially true when one realizes that many cases of disability could have been prevented if proper heed had been taken at the right time. Here I speak of congenital disabilities resulting from the use of drugs, or due to alcoholism or smoking by pregnant women.

The disabled do not need pity or charity. What they need from all of us is support and, I repeat, the will to act and help to help themselves. Here the strong family structural patterns of the developing world could spontaneously provide a source of strength for any member of a family who is disabled.

The Secretary-General's report contains an ambitious programme of action, which by the end of 1993 will have components such as the Programme, providing a strong policy framework, and the long-term strategy, which will set definite targets to be achieved within specific time-frames. It calls for national affirmative action for the period 1993-2002, encompassing those components. With the creation of widespread awareness, this is a model programme which Governments could follow.

It is also commendable that United Nations specialized agencies have played a significant supportive role. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have established community-based programmes to assist and rehabilitate the disabled in several Latin American and African nations; other organizations have worked to prevent the spread of blindness, particularly in Africa and Asia. Several other organizations have worked for the rehabilitation of disabled children and refugees.

My Government has, in its own modest way, been working for the betterment of the disabled. Their number in India is estimated to be around 12 million. Several national institutes have been set up for their education, training, counselling and rehabilitation. A sum of $70 million has been set aside in the national budget for the period of the Eighth Five-Year Plan, from 1992 to 1997, for the welfare of the disabled.

At the request of the General Assembly, our former Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, launched the international IMPACT programme in India. It is jointly sponsored by the UNDP, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The ambitious target set for India was the reduction of the major causes of avoidable disabilities by one third in the first 10 years. Our success story is the 80 per cent immunization achieved so far in the cities of India and the fact that the eradication of poliomyelitis in the next 10 years is conceivable. India was the first country to launch eye camps; in 1991 alone 1.2 million cataract operations were performed in India's village eye camps. The Indian Government has cooperated closely with United Nations agencies to make India a leading success story for the IMPACT programme. The Lifeline Express, donated by the Indian railways, for example, performs 150 major operations a day in rural India.

A major programme of the Indian Government was the granting of scholarships to the disabled on the basis of means cum merit tests. Other initiatives included the setting up of special employment exchanges for the placement of the disabled and the reservation for the disabled of 3 per cent of Group C and D posts in central government and public sector undertakings.

The observance of the International Year for Disabled Persons in 1981 gave a fillip to the expansion of services throughout the country. A number of employment, travel and other concessions were extended to the disabled, both by the central Government and by State Governments. Among other programmes were the integrated education of the disabled in vocational rehabilitation centres, apprenticeship training programmes and the establishment of district rehabilitation centres.

Every year the President of India presents National Awards to outstanding employers of disabled persons and to the most efficient disabled employees or disabled self-employed persons in the Government and private sectors. The Government of India has set up a National Disabled Welfare Fund, with voluntary contributions from the public sector, the private sector and the general public. The Fund is utilized to augment existing voluntary services for the welfare of the disabled.

In this context, I should like to mention the phenomenal success of the "Jaipur Foot", an artificial, flexible limb developed by doctors at Jaipur in our State of Rajasthan, which has been used successfully by many thousands in India. It has also been made available at affordable prices. There has been interest in its application for the war-wounded in countries like El Salvador, Nicaragua and Cambodia.

(Mr. Bhagat, India)

The year 1993 has been designated the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Year for the Disabled. India hopes to participate fully along with our neighbours in the SAARC programmes proposed.

Ultimately, the best support that we can give to these unfortunate brethren is the common realization among all of us that society's well-being lies in large measure in the welfare of the disabled among us.

Mrs. MUNTEANU (Romania) (interpretation from French): Before making my statement, I should like to extend my people's heartfelt sympathy to the Egyptian people in their suffering.

I should like to express my thanks for the invitation to participate in this work and to say how delighted I am to have this opportunity to meet so many of my colleagues and friends and to share with you our ideas, our concerns, our satisfactions and dissatisfactions regarding the status of the disabled in our respective countries and throughout the world.

I would like to try to organise my statement around three themes: first, philosophy, programmes and an overview of work done for disabled persons; secondly, national effort and the need for greater international cooperation in the field of policies and approaches to the disabled; and thirdly, the establishment of a permanent international mechanism which would seek to enhance the status of the disabled.

We share the view that, despite progress made at the national and international levels, the status of the disabled is still of concern, and that efforts should be stepped up, along with international cooperation, to bring about greater changes in society's attitude and to achieve truly independent living for the disabled.

(Mrs. Munteanu, Romania)

Bearing in mind the provisions of the declaration of the 1991 Paris meeting of European ministers in charge of policies for the disabled, along with the conclusions of the Vienna ad hoc working group, which analysed the standard rules on the subject in order to speed up equalization of opportunity for the disabled, and those of the first international conference, recently held in Montreal on the initiative of Mr. Robert de Cotret, to whom we are very grateful, we have tried to identify certain features of a coherent policy for the disabled that we wish to submit to you.

We are convinced that a valid, credible policy for the disabled must include the following elements: relevant provisions in the legislation of each country concerning the specific rights of the disabled; the incorporation of the rights of the disabled in international instruments on the subject; the adoption of national programmes on medical, psychological, pedagogical and social and vocational rehabilitation, with precise goals covering all aspects of life, including the establishment of special institutions with the full participation of the disabled; the gradual elimination of obstacles and barriers of all kinds and of prejudices against the disabled, through joint actions of institutions and agencies which might be conducive to a new approach to disability; and the organization, at the national and international levels, of an ongoing campaign to increase the sensitivity of the public, in institutions and in governmental and non-governmental bodies, regarding the problems, needs and frustrations of the disabled, in order to try to find suitable solutions to these problems with the participation of the whole of society, and to give disabled people a feeling of dignity, usefulness and full participation in community life.

As regards the programmes and the results of initiatives for the disabled, we are all aware of them, and I do not wish to dwell on them. I merely wish to say that I fully agree that concerted efforts within the framework of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons and the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, as well as the initiatives taken by other international meetings, have produced significant progress.

International cooperation in any field, including the domain of the disabled, must be closely related to the national policies of States in this area.

Basing itself on the general concept of observance of human rights, Romania has drafted and implemented as of 1989 a coherent programme to bring about a speedy, meaningful improvement in the status of the disabled.

The difficulties that my Government has encountered and in particular those encountered by the Secretariat of State for the Disabled, which has just been set up, have been quite sizeable: obsolete technology in existing institutions and their endowments; an acute lack of specialists and know-how; and a mentality regarding and approaches to disabled persons that have been distorted by forty years of totalitarianism.

The implementation of the national programme for special protection for the disabled has enabled us not only to make tangible improvement in the status of these people but also to raise awareness and to involve in this complex and difficult endeavour both governmental and non-governmental institutions as well as public opinion.

Real support has been provided by the international community, and I wish to take this opportunity to say how grateful Romania is to all those who have shown understanding and solidarity with my country.

The positive results obtained by Romania in a rather short time, thanks also to international cooperation, encourage us to go forward and to seek, together with other countries, the best means of finding, through our common effort, the best solutions so that disabled persons may be enabled to use their creative potential, enjoy truly independent lives and play a dignified role in the life of the community.

(Mrs. Munteanu, Romania)

The existence and proper functioning of a national body has meant that we now have an overview and can contribute to the programmes and operational and legislative initiatives for the disabled and that we can intervene periodically to implement them.

We are certain that at the international level more consistent coordination and cooperation is necessary.

It is clear that in order to have better information about the experiences of various countries and in order to gather the necessary data for an exact and specific evaluation of national and regional needs to better implement international standards and to benefit from the know-how of other countries in the field of assistance to the disabled, we all need a well-defined international structure - a permanent, inexpensive but effective mechanism which should be part of the specialized agencies of the United Nations.

I wish to highlight some of the advantages and facilities that a permanent international structure could give to cooperation among countries.

First of all, a permanent structure is necessary in order to coordinate and monitor implementation of world-wide and regional programmes for the disabled.

Experience has demonstrated that similar programmes require adaptation as well as ongoing consultations and, in particular, a coordination of efforts at the regional and global levels, which can only be effective if there is a permanent structure that can act or intervene at any time.

A permanent mechanism can become a very effective instrument in defending individual rights if it intervenes promptly in given situations, cooperates

(Mrs. Munteanu, Romania)

with Governments and helps mobilize public opinion to encourage people to treat the disabled on an equal footing with other citizens.

One might envisage an ongoing public and governmental awareness campaign under the aegis of an international secretariat. Such a campaign would promote a better understanding of the status of the disabled and of how individuals and institutions can help improve it.

A permanent structure could play a despatching role to facilitate a working partnership and to provide assistance for setting up pilot projects. It could provide a means of exchanging project data, experience and opportunities - which would obviously lead to greater cooperation among States.

That is why Romania is firmly convinced that States involved in international cooperation for the disabled should not scatter their resources and knowledge in individual parallel projects which are costly and sometimes of limited impact.

A concerted effort through the establishment of permanent machinery might prove to be more beneficial for the disabled as well as for international cooperation designed to help them.

International cooperation for the disabled has taken on obvious momentum. The work of our meeting is proof of this. However, to maintain the momentum on a permanent basis requires a proper and highly competent organisational structure.

Human solidarity and international cooperation, which are the goal, represent a powerful force that can change the future and, through a new philosophy, point the way to a society for all.

It is up to us to meet this challenge.

Mr. PENNANEACH (Togo) (interpretation from French): A cruel tragedy has just befallen the people and Government of Egypt involving great loss of life and material damage. At this difficult time for that fraternal people, my delegation wishes to convey sincere condolences and feelings of solidarity.

Ten years ago, the United Nations proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. Now that it is coming to an end, we should take stock of the results, evaluate the successes, take note of the obstacles encountered and define new ways in order better to attain the goals of the World Programme of Action concerning the Disabled.

In participating in this discussion, the delegation of Togo wishes to reaffirm its solidarity with and profound sympathy for all persons who are partially or totally disabled, as well as our firm commitment to strengthen measures to bring about their full integration into society.

The proclamation of 1983 to 1992 as the Decade of Disabled Persons has drawn increased attention to the disabled and to their integration. This difficult but necessary process requires not only comprehension and support but proper funding.

The Decade has brought the disabled into the mainstream of society; it has recast their image as complete people enjoying all of the rights and - in so far as possible - all of the duties inherent in the human condition. In Togo, through their various associations, the handicapped used every means at their disposal, last year, to bring about a change in public attitudes so that they might be accepted as an integral part of the human community.

(Mr. Pennaneach, Togo)

In implementation of the World Programme of Action to mark this Decade, Togo has drafted legislation and undertaken a campaign aimed at preventing disability and at providing medical equipment and vocational training.*

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* Mr. Dangue Rewaka (Gabon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

(Mr. Pennaneach, Togo)

In the field of disability prevention a specific immunization programme has been drawn up and is being very carefully implemented in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This has enabled us to immunize children from birth to the age of seven and women of child-bearing age. Immunization coverage is now at about 36 per cent of the target population. A vast programme to eradicate oncocerciasis covers four countries of West Africa. The campaign against leprosy, to which my Government, in cooperation with the Raoul Follereau Foundation, has been committed for more than 10 years, is beginning to yield results.

Measures to reduce the seriousness of disability have been improved. The National Orthopedic Centre and the Centre for Functional Reeducation have been strengthened. However, the acquisition of orthopedic apparatus is difficult because of the very high cost involved.

But other specific work has been done for the disabled to make sure they can be trained as much as possible: centres have been set up to train the mentally retarded, deaf-mutes and the blind; within the competent technical Ministry a structure has been set up to carry out programmes for the disabled; a plan for the vocational rehabilitation of disabled persons has been set up with the help of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO).

With regard to organizing disabled persons, it should be stressed that the Togo Federation of Associations of Handicapped Persons has been created in order better to understand the specific problems linked to the various categories of disabled people.

That, then, is a brief overview of what my Government has been doing pursuant to the World Programme of Action, which is so ambitious and humanistic. As can be seen, all the objectives of the Programme have not been achieved, not for any lack of political will but because the funds available were insufficient.

As is quite rightly - and forcefully - stressed by the Secretary-General in his report, the worsening economic and social situation - marked by low growth rates, high unemployment rates, reduced public spending, the implementation of structural adjustment programmes, and privatization - has had a negative impact on programmes and services in developed and developing countries alike.

In fact, the impact has been most negative in the developing countries, where the cruel lack of funding makes living conditions increasingly difficult. It is sad to observe that, while the Decade has enabled many disabled people from the developed countries to progress even better than before, this has not been the case for those in the developing countries who, for the most part, have been left to their own resources. The lot of women, children and people living in rural areas is even worse.

Despite the efforts made by the United Nations within the framework of the Decade, the developing countries have not really been able to integrate the disabled. Eloquent testimony to this is the situation in this very General Assembly Hall. How many disabled people from the developing countries have we seen speak from this rostrum to make their invaluable contribution to our discussion? How many disabled brothers and sisters have spoken of the Decade and defended their cause in this community of nations? There could have been many of them, but can they afford the trip?

(Mr. Pennaneach, Togo)

How many disabled persons from the developing countries do we see on television participating in sporting events or working on a computer? How many disabled people from the developing countries have been totally integrated into the lives of their cities, or even into the production sector?

My point is that the road to fully integrating handicapped people in developing countries is a very long and difficult one. To make that road easier it is important to strengthen cooperation among nations and to implement the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report on the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons.

It is clear that the developing countries, particularly the least developed, however important their actions have been on their own, could not meet the challenges of the World Programme of Action concerning the Disabled.

We also note that regional cooperation, which should have provided a broader, more forceful framework for the disabled, has suffered in Africa as a result of many problems, particularly the deteriorating economic and social situation, political and social problems, armed conflicts, lack of primary health care programmes, endemic diseases, epidemics, and so forth.

Nevertheless, we welcome the work done by international organizations in raising the consciousness of Governments and public opinion about the status of the disabled, as well as the mobilization of financial and material resources. Togo is grateful to the international organizations and to the non-governmental organizations which have helped it implement projects for the disabled.

(Mr. Pennaneach, Togo)

The facts are there, and they emphasize the disparity between countries, particularly as regards available funding, technical know-how, and necessary support services for the proper implementation of the United Nations World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons.

As this Decade draws to a close, we feel it is increasingly urgent to continue to concern ourselves with the disabled. And that is why my delegation fully supports the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his report, and in particular his proposal to find the solutions to the problems of the disabled within a context of integrated social development and by increased awareness and a better understanding of the problems of the disabled. My delegation also endorses the following relevant proposals of the Secretary-General: the adoption of a long-term programme of action for the period 1993 to 2002; the establishment within legislative bodies of a permanent committee on the status of the disabled; the proclamation of regional decades; the definition of a programme of action with specific objectives taking us to the year 2002; and the creation of an institute, or national or regional centre, on disability and the handicapped pursuant to resolution 46/96.

(Mr. Pennaneach, Togo)

We think that it is important that there be added to these recommendations a recommendation that consciousness should be raised. We need true integration that is carefully prepared from an early age. We must put a stop to pity and to condescending paternalism. The disabled do not want pity. They are men and women just like us, with their personalities and their rights, and we must treat them as such. Have we truly abandoned the pathetic solutions resulting from that unhappy past of laissez-faire charity or the intolerable logic based on profit?

Despite the obstacles to implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons for the soon to end Decade, my delegation hopes that the international community will give greater attention to the disabled by using appropriate means to support the implementation of various socio-economic programmes designed to secure their full development. In so doing, we shall ensure that the disabled are enabled fully to exercise their legitimate rights.

More tolerance and solidarity in the world, right here and now, would make it easier for those who find it difficult to play a full role in society. But vocational integration, like social integration, of physically or mentally disabled persons and people with sensory disabilities is not just a question of making declarations of principle or producing rules; it is a question of political will and concrete action - above all, the expression of active fraternity.

The society of the future, if it is to be a society of peace, must be based on solidarity. We invite all United Nations Members to work for this solidarity. Instead of excluding the disabled, let us stretch out our hands. They will help us to understand and to love; they will, by their deeply moving action, help to lead us to that more just world of solidarity the United Nations is working to bring about.

Mr. ELHOUDERI (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (interpretation from Arabic): I should like, on behalf of my delegation, to condole with and express our full sympathy and solidarity to the fraternal people of Egypt in the wake of the earthquake that hit Cairo and caused a large number of deaths and injuries.

Allow me, Mr. President, at the beginning of my statement, to welcome this special celebration which reflects the importance the international community attaches to the question of the disabled.

Our celebration, this year, of the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons reflects world-wide awareness of the needs and rights of the disabled, who, it must be understood, have the same rights and duties as any other member of society. To ignore the disabled would be to overlook considerable human potential, which could be used in construction and development.

My country had the honour of initiating the declaration of the International Year of the Disabled, which we celebrated in 1991. It chaired the work of the Consultative Body for the International Year with great energy and vigour, and succeeded in drawing up political guidelines designed to achieve the objectives of the International Year.

Having been involved in all this, my country would have hoped to be able to participate in this important meeting with a delegation that would have included a number of disabled persons, so that they might be given an opportunity personally to speak of the success that has been achieved in pursuing the objectives of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons and of the activities under the International Plan for the Disabled aimed at prevention, rehabilitation and equal opportunity.

Unfortunately, the negative effects of the air embargo against my country, imposed pursuant to Security Council resolution 748 (1992), have made it impossible for those disabled persons to take part in this meeting. Disabled people in our delegation would have been obliged to use road transport over the great distances involved in reaching an airport in Tunisia or Egypt. This would have exposed them to considerable hardship and unbearable suffering.

Indeed, the effects of the embargo are not limited to restricting our participation in international meetings and conferences of such importance. The adverse effects of the embargo are felt also in the area of activities relating to the disabled. I refer to the slow delivery of artificial limbs and of the medical equipment needed by those people. This creates many problems for the disabled, who are in urgent need of such things in order for them to be able to cope with the burden of their disabilities.

Furthermore, the air embargo has prevented us from benefiting from the services and assistance of specialists who are needed to examine and treat patients with severe disabilities. In addition, the embargo has prevented or caused delays in the arrival of the much needed medical personnel who work in institutions providing medical, psychological and social services to the deaf, the mute, the mentally retarded, the paralysed and the chronically ill.

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Arab Jamahiriya)

All this has led to a worsening of the level of medical services provided by those institutions.

While we appreciate the positive results achieved through the Decade, such as the increased integration of disabled people into public life, equalization of opportunities in the areas of education, employment and training, assured participation in the various social, cultural and economic activities available to other members of society; and while we also appreciate the growth in numbers and the development of the activities of national committees and agencies responsible for the disabled and the revitalization of their role in national life, we must say that the objectives of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons have not been fully achieved. The numbers of disabled have risen to 500 million, 80 per cent of whom live in developing countries, because of the spread of disease, hunger, malnutrition, poverty, armed conflict, civil war, and deteriorating economic and social conditions, all of which beset many developing countries.

All these circumstances have led to a scarcity of the necessary resources required to achieve the objectives of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons. Therefore, we stress the need to adopt a long-term strategy through the year 2000 and beyond in order to ensure the continued implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons after the conclusion of the Decade with a view to creating a society-for-all by 2010. New guidelines aiming at improving the living conditions of the disabled and fostering their full integration into the community should be formulated. Those guidelines should take into account the needs of the most vulnerable segments of the disabled in the developing countries, such as the elderly, women and children.

We set great hope on international cooperation in the area of technical assistance in providing the needs of the disabled, in particular by means of the transfer of technology and the sharing of experience from countries that possess such technology and experience to countries that do not, in order to assist in such areas as rehabilitation and the prevention of disabilities.

We attach great importance to the drawing up of rules and norms with respect to equalization of opportunities for the disabled of all categories and all age groups and welcome the work now being done by the working group whose job it is to draw up such rules and norms. We hope that the group will succeed in concluding its work in time for it to present the results to the next session of the General Assembly.

We pay tribute to the key role played by the United Nations Fund toward achieving the development objectives of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons. In our view, it is necessary for that United Nations Fund to be maintained even beyond the end of the Decade in view of its importance in bolstering national capacities, especially in the area of rehabilitation and the prevention of disability in many developing countries.

My country, Libya, was among the first to emphasize the question of the disabled at both the national and international levels. This stemmed from our profound faith in the human principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter

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and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the course of the International Year of Disabled Persons my country enacted Law 3 (1981) concerning the disabled. That law included a definition of the disabled, defined the groups involved and the advantages and benefits that should be provided to them along with the other facilities and services they would need in the areas of care and rehabilitation, together with education and retraining, job opportunities, tax and excise duty exemptions, while providing them with special facilities in the area of transportation; all in order to ensure the highest possible level of care for the disabled.

In the area of prevention of disabilities, the Law provided for the setting up of a national committee on the disabled whose mandate is primarily the prevention of disability and the integration of the disabled into society both professionally and socially while providing the best possible living conditions for them. A number of international organizations have recognized that Law as a model to be imitated.

However, that Law did not include a provision specifically on the prevention of disability. In order to rectify this, Law 5 (1987) was promulgated to replace Law 3 (1981). The first provision in Law 5 (1987) stipulates the prevention of disability and regards prevention as a responsibility of the individual, the family, the community and grass-roots organizations in society. The new Law defined the various groups of disabled persons and set the allowances and benefits provided to each group. It also made provision for rehabilitation and defined the role of each government

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agency in this respect. The legislation on the disabled in my country has led to the setting up of a large number of organizations and special centres that provide care together with education and rehabilitation services to the disabled in a number of towns and villages including the Centre for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons in Benghazi, the one in Tripoli set up in 1983, the institutes that provide medical care for the mentally handicapped in Aziziyah and Massa, the Institute for the Deaf in Benghazi, the Institute for Special Education for the Mentally Handicapped in Ganzour, the Association for the Blind in Benghazi and the Society of Light for the Blind also in Tripoli.

The disabled in my country, through their associations, contribute effectively not only to the creation of employment opportunities for the disabled, but also to the political and economic life of the country in which they play a key role like all other members of society. They now have an active role to play in decision-making at all levels and in all areas.

(Mr. Elhouderi, Libyan
Arab Jamahiriya)

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to pay tribute to the Secretary-General and to commend him for his report in document A/47/415. My delegation supports the recommendations in that report, which call for the shifting of focus in the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons from awareness-raising to action, with a view to articulating a coherent overall policy on the integration of disabled persons into the normal life of their communities. My delegation also wishes to express its appreciation to the Vienna Centre for the work it is doing in implementing the Programme of Action despite its limited resources.

In response to the urgent and growing needs in the developing countries, we believe that it is vital to allocate appropriate resources to the Centre to enable it to carry out the activities set out in the Programme of Action well beyond the end of the decade.

Mr. NOBILO (Croatia): I should like to express the deepest sympathy of my Government to the Government and people of the friendly Arab Republic of Egypt upon the terrible earthquake that recently struck Cairo.

Croatia is proud to seize this opportunity to speak at the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons and on the tenth anniversary of the World Programme of Action. Allow me to express our deep appreciation for everything the world community has accomplished in organizing and helping the disabled to live in an environment that accepts them as they are, and in lifting all the barriers - in architecture and in people's minds alike. We are grateful to the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly for ensuring that this important item would be included on the agenda of the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly. We would also like to refer to the Secretary-General's praiseworthy report, which contains precise guidelines for action concerning this item.

The Decade that is now behind us has been appraised as the "decade of accomplishment". And so it has been, since numerous programmes have been envisaged and carried out by many United Nations agencies and organisations during the past 10 years. At the same time, there are new challenges and new realities, and so we cannot confidently enjoy our results, no matter how we appreciate them.

Many factors beyond our control cause disabilities. Human actions, sometimes deliberate, account for many human tragedies in the world. But war is the most horrible of them all. In the last 40 years Europe has concentrated all its efforts on enabling the handicapped to live normal lives, on the presumption that all their problems were part of a peaceful, everyday environment. Unfortunately, Croatia nowadays is forced to solve the problem of disabled persons under conditions of war and as a consequence of military aggression.

Let me present some tragic figures. In the Republic of Croatia, during war operations over the 15 months prior to 1 October 1992, 5,746 persons were killed and 21,269 - including civilians and members of the Police Force and Croatian Army - were injured or wounded. Consequently, 1,535 of them have remained permanently disabled. The numbers are largest for cases of limb amputations and brain and spinal-cord injuries, but also include cases of blindness, deafness, permanent mental disorder, tetraplegia and paraplegia. One third of all wounded - that is, 6,198 people - and almost one-half of those killed - 1,872 - have been civilians, which are unusually high proportions.

These data represent only the minimal number of confirmed casualties. The number has increased considerably now that we know that at least 800 civilians have been massacred, executed or brutally murdered in the occupied territories of Croatia by Serbian insurgents and paramilitary troops. 3,000 are still missing after the fall of the city of Vukovar to the Yugoslav Army, and most of them are presumed killed. The total of missing persons is 14,852, with the horrifying presumption that most of them are no longer alive.

I have to emphasize that the numbers I have given apply only to those persons who have been accounted for, and do not include all the people presumed killed, injured, missing or held in captivity by the enemy forces. The real number, which we are sure will not be available until long after the hostilities have ceased throughout the area, is far larger than the one stated or envisaged here.

Most of the disabled persons are young men of 20 to 26 years of age. Our hospitals and rehabilitation centres are working at their highest capacities but can hardly meet the bare necessities. The situation is further aggravated by the presence of thousands of soldiers and civilians from Bosnia and Herzegovina, among whom is a significant number of disabled or handicapped persons. Those people have no income, no housing facilities and no possibility of returning to their homes. The Republic of Croatia will continue, however, to provide all the necessary assistance that the wounded and refugees from Bosnia require. But we can do so little without the help of the world community.

Croatia faces a huge problem in reintegrating its disabled persons into everyday life. Mostly very young, they will have to face the problems of starting a family and finding employment and homes. Furthermore, they have to go through a difficult process of social adaptation. The heavy burden of the post-war period is making this task even more delicate. Serious material problems delay the discharge of casualties upon completion of their rehabilitation process. Besides the disabled war victims, Croatia has approximately 450,000 handicapped persons of all categories. Many of them are having growing problems in adjusting to the new situation, especially those living in the war-torn areas.

Before the war Croatia made significant steps towards improving the living conditions of disabled persons and integrating them into society. But the war has seriously hampered those efforts. Many disabled persons have lost all their family and are left alone with nobody to care or provide for them. Today their goal is not to attain the conditions enabling them to participate in society on a footing of equality with others; their major - indeed, their only - goal is to survive. Therefore they depend more than any others on Croatia's ability to recover as soon as possible from the destruction caused by the war and to restore its industrial, transportation, and social infrastructure to at least the pre-war level. International help is playing a decisive role in these efforts.

Because of the increased number of disabled persons, it has been necessary to expand the capacities of Croatian rehabilitation institutions. The Republic of Croatia does not have a comprehensive rehabilitation centre able to treat all types of disability. The absolute priority is to establish a national rehabilitation centre for brain and spinal-cord injuries. Croatia will be grateful for all available support in creating that centre. The Department of Information and Research at the Croatian Ministry of Health issued an appeal to over 100 international humanitarian organizations to support financially the rehabilitation of disabled persons who are victims of war. Unfortunately, no positive answer has been received so far.

The problems Croatia is facing concerning the disabled are great and increasingly numerous. Although Croatia has received a significant amount of aid in drugs and medical material, we still need help from the international community. In spite of all the difficulties, we shall not leave any of our handicapped persons without proper care and assistance.

The basic provision of our civilization is that all men are equal. All men are entitled to equal rights, including the more unfortunate among us. The World Programme of Action exists, but it still has to be brought to life. It is our hope that the consideration of the issue by this high body will give further impetus to the improvement of the situation of disabled persons throughout the world. The Republic of Croatia is ready to do its share.

Mr. SHIWEDAH (Namibia): Allow me first of all, on behalf of the Namibian delegation, to express to the people of Egypt our sincere condolences and sympathy on the loss of life and material damage suffered as a result of the devastating earthquake that struck Cairo.

As we come together to evaluate our achievements of the past 10 years, where we stand today and the road ahead, I wish to put on record my delegation's appreciation for being a participant in these historic plenary meetings, the first of their kind.

We come together when major wars have ceased and world peace seems to have been preserved. Not very long ago the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, pointed out in his "Agenda for Peace" the interconnection between peace and social and economic development in these words:

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> "The social stability needed for productive growth is nurtured by conditions in which people can readily express their will. For this, strong domestic institutions of participation are essential. Promoting such institutions means promoting the empowerment of the unorganized, the poor, the marginalized." (A/47/277, para. 81)

The link between peace and social and economic development on the one hand and disability on the other cannot be overemphasized. Although major wars have ceased, civil strife, poverty, drought, hunger and a lack of health-care facilities continue to be a major impediment, especially in the developing countries. Thus, in tackling the core problems of disability issues, there should be a focus on, inter alia, narrowing the gap between the haves and the have-nots. It is in this context that my delegation welcomes the summit for social development to be held in 1995; we hope that the world situation of persons with disabilities will find a prominent place on the agenda of that summit.

Ten years ago, when the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons was declared, the people of Namibia were engaged in a war which not only culminated in our national liberation, but resulted in a large number of persons, including children, with disabilities. The neglect of persons with disabilities by the former colonial Administration in Namibia excluded the disabled from all spheres of human life.

Thus, following the independence of Namibia on 21 March 1990, my Government placed the situation of the disabled among the priorities of its development programmes. Furthermore, the broad framework of fundamental human

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rights and freedoms enshrined in our Constitution provides tools for the protection of their rights and enhanced integration of the disabled in the spheres of education, health, employment and accessibility and so forth. We are fully convinced that the achievement of full integration of disabled persons into mainstream services requires a multi-disciplinary approach, well coordinated policy and action relevant to the needs of disabled persons. My Government, therefore, through the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation, has been instrumental in ensuring that detailed programmes and development planning for the provision of services are worked out by other Government bodies.

Our achievements during our two years of independence can be attributed to the will and determination of the disabled themselves to succeed in the betterment of their lives and the high and personal interest and concern of the President of the Republic of Namibia for the welfare of the disabled. In 1991, when hundreds of disabled persons delegated by their regional organizations gathered in Windhoek to launch the National Organization of Disabled Persons, the President of the Republic of Namibia, who himself was a participant, launched the National Disability Fund and declared 1992 as the Year of the Disabled in Namibia. That was done to mark the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons.

Whereas 1992 marks the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, for us in Namibia it marks the beginning of raising awareness on disability; some progress has been made. Through its inter-ministerial and

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national co-ordination committees, the National Organization of Disabled Persons in Namibia has been advocating equal rights for the disabled and the need to integrate them in the education, health, sports and economic fields.

While emphasis has been placed on consciousness-raising and putting structures in place all over the country, concrete projects have been embarked upon with the help of various international non-governmental organizations. Four capital projects in the areas of agriculture, tailoring, gardening and leatherwork and other small projects are functioning. Those small projects, although far from being sufficient, create employment opportunities for some disabled persons. It is our aim to transform those small projects into capital projects and thus generate income. Furthermore, the Private Sector Foundation renders assistance through credit facilities for self-help projects by people with disabilities.

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With assistance from the International Labour Organisation consultant a document that constitutes the National Policy on Rehabilitation and Integration of Disabled Persons has been finalized and is now in operation. In February 1993 a seminar will be held to produce a layman's draft to be formulated into a draft Bill on national disability legislation.

Despite all those achievements, the road we have to cover in Namibia remains longer than the distance we have gone. The problems to be tackled far outweigh the available resources. The lack of trained personnel and infrastructure and the unavailability of data and information on the disabled compounds our organizational constraints.

We applaud the achievements set out in the Secretary-General's report and wish to reiterate that during the Decade the international community has come to realise that disabled persons are citizens with equal rights and obligations. The emergence of numerous national organizations of the disabled is in itself testimony that great strides have been made by disabled persons themselves in making their communities see them as productive members of society.

Notwithstanding the achievements made over the past 10 years, much remains to be done. The situation of women with disabilities has not improved. In many parts of the developing countries women with disabilities are still excluded from the health, education and economic spheres, not to mention the decision-making process. The majority are in the rural areas, where they are heading families, most of the time singlehandedly. Since Namibia is facing a severe drought, their efforts to fend for themselves and their children are made even more difficult. Hence, the Government, through the National Drought Task Force, has decided to provide free food supplies to

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vulnerable groups, namely, lactating mothers, the aged, the disabled and children. Internationally, women have to cope with discrimination based on gender and on their disability. Although they are members of national organisations of disabled persons, their voices are often not heard. It is in this context that we welcome the World Conference on Women in 1995. We look forward to the participation of women with disabilities in that Conference and the adoption of concrete programmes and action on women with disabilities. They know what they are enduring. Let us give them a chance. Let their voices be heard.

In many parts of the world the will and commitment to alleviate the situation of disabled persons is more often defeated by lack of resources. While the United Nations Decade saw no additional resources, the root causes of the rising number of persons with disabilities - poverty, drought, famine, conflicts - were on the increase. Thus, the disproportion between the resources available and the programmes and tasks we set ourselves for the Decade impeded the very progress we are aiming for.

The post-1992 era calls for a shift from awareness-raising to concrete action. It calls for the enactment of legislation for disabled persons. At all levels, persons with disabilities should be integrated into the overall social-economic development sphere, and national efforts should be complemented by international will and support. To ensure that the many programmes adopted during the Decade are implemented, my delegation welcomes the Secretary-General's recommendation that possibilities be explored of establishing a mechanism whereby reports on the status of disabled persons could be presented by disabled persons themselves.

Children with disabilities must be integrated into regular schools, while taking into consideration their specific needs. In this way we shall, at the

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outset, remove the negative attitude with which children have perceived one another. In southern Africa hundreds of children have been left orphans, traumatized or disabled by the wars of destabilization that ravaged this subregion. We owe those children, and many others in different parts of the world, a future. We commend the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for their concrete programmes to make the world a better place for children. We welcome the International Conference on Assistance to African Children, to be held in Dakar, Senegal, by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) from 25 to 28 November 1992. We hope that that Conference will also be the start of a process for improving the situation of children with disabilities. The situation of the African child warrants all necessary support.

We should like to see the organization of regional seminars on people with disabilities. Where regional mechanisms exist - as in our region, where we have the Southern African Federation of the Disabled - they should be supported to enable them to render support to the national organizations.

It is fortunate that the marking of the end of the United Nations Decade on Disabled Persons has coincided with the restructuring of the United Nations. It is our hope that the needs of disabled persons will have a prominent place on the agenda of United Nations restructuring. There is a need to have a permanent structure within the United Nations dealing with issues of disability. The integration of persons with disabilities should not bypass the United Nations Secretariat at its various levels. When a permanent structure is established within the United Nations, persons with disabilities should form part of that body.

United Nations technical assistance to developing countries should be increased to help alleviate the situation of the disabled. The United Nations leadership role must be strengthened to enable it to render asistance to regional and national efforts. Needless to say, the increasing expectations will, in turn, require additional resources for the implementation of various programmes at all levels. The United Nations Voluntary Fund on disability will need uninterrupted funding.

Mr. CASTEDO (Spain)(interpretation from Spanish): First, on behalf of my Government, I wish to convey our condolences and heartfelt sympathy to the Government and people of Egypt on the occasion of the tragic loss of life caused by the earthquake that struck the city of Cairo.

Spain, as a member country of the European Community, endorses the statement made on behalf of its member States by the representative of the United Kingdom. I wish, however, to give some information about our national experience.

Ten years ago the General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons. This year, 1992, is also the tenth anniversary of the adoption by my country's Congress of Deputies of the Disabled Persons Social Integration Act.

(Mr. Castedo, Spain)

That Act advocates the same principles and promotes similar measures in virtually the same areas as the United Nations World Programme of Action. Without exaggeration, we could describe our Act as the Spanish version of the Programme.

The Disabled Persons' Social Integration Act was the response that Spanish society brought to the needs and problems of the community of citizens affected by some disability. A time frame of 10 years was set for it. It was enacted as a framework law indicating approaches and paths, giving guidance for strategies for intervention and types of organization and entrusting the various departments explicit and concrete mandates - all of which is part of an overall and coherent vision of the entire spectrum of problems affecting the disabled.

The Act embodies a large number of principles as guidelines for global or sectoral action respecting the disabled community. Social integration as the ultimate aim and only way of success for the many measures proposed, instead of fragmented or marginal strategies; basing of services and benefits on rights, which is a break from the earlier tradition of charity or benevolence; prioritizing of rehabilitation and provision of services over mere economic benefits; normalization of provision of services; and participation of users, and so forth - all are principles introduced or endorsed by the Disabled Persons' Social Integration Act, and are today key features of our daily endeavours.

In order to achieve the ultimate aim of integration, the Act proposes a strategy based on four mutually supportive pillars that all underpin that ultimate objective. These are prevention, rehabilitation, equalization of opportunity, and protection for disabled persons.

(Mr. Castedo, Spain)

Prevention is a right and duty of each and every citizen and society as a whole. It is part of the priority obligations of the State in the realm of public health and social services. Rehabilition is the central pillar of the entire strategy of the Act and the axis of the entire system, especially with respect to measures of economic protection, employment promotion, and integration into the workforce, which act as incentives for the whole process. Rehabilitation is regarded as the most powerful instrument for achieving integration, which, for the purposes of the Act, implies the fundamental integration into the workforce of disabled persons.

Four major groups of rehabilitation programmes are currently under way in Spain: early care, aimed at children; educational integration for school-age children with special educational needs, aimed at integration into the ordinary educational system; functional rehabilitation, where of particular note is the growing use of technical aids in improving the physical autonomy of disabled persons; and, lastly, occupational rehabilitation, with the increasing application of new technologies in the areas of training, of the adaption of workplaces, and of the design of ideal kinds of work for some disabled persons.

By means of equalizing opportunities we aim at a series of environmental changes that will foster integration, while we are mindful of the fact that this is only possible if, at the same time, changes take place in our societies. The aim of these measures is to promote solidarity among citizens vis-à-vis those persons disadvantaged as a result of a disability. This solidarity is manifested in the elimination of the obstacles of urban, legal, and socio-cultural life; in compensation for disadvantages in the fields of legal adaptation, specific support services and additional economic assistance; and in the promotion of the disabled community through participation, mutual assistance, and the formation of associations.

Of particular importance is the establishment of mutual assistance networks and associations of disabled persons, and the growing participation of non-governmental organizations in setting up and administrating services to benefit disabled persons. The role which non-governmental organizations play in achieving these objectives is critical and, although there has been considerable expansion in their activities in Spain in the last decade, there remains much to be done, particularly in terms of allowing them to share responsibility with Government in developing positive action to facilitate full integration.

Measures in the area of protection are aimed at achieving the final objective of integration through increasingly higher standards of well-being for disabled persons and, by extension, of the immediate community in which they live. These include measures of economic protection, legal protection, and family protection.

Overall economic, social and legal protection for disabled persons has been the most highly developed aspect of the Decade in our country. The transition has been made from condescending protection grounded in the tradition of charity to protection of another kind based on the entitlement of individuals. From a special system of protection, the community has joined the State social security regime, which the Constitution recognizes as the right of all Spanish citizens.

Aware of the leading role of families in the protection and well-being of disabled family members, and also of the fact that the welfare of one individual is hard to separate from the well-being of the family, the current protection approach regards family protection as a key element.

Family protection includes meeting the needs that arise from the presence in the home of a disabled person. It consists basically of economic assistance that relieves the economic burden of an inactive and economically dependent family member or the added expenditure of meeting that person's specific needs. It also consists of family support through information and advisory services, as well as services involving temporary reception or the relief - sometimes on a long-term basis - of the family from the burden of permament care. In some cases, they may substitute on a temporary basis for the caretakers in given families where there are serious problems.

These then are the major lines and principal measures promoted by the Act in the last decade in Spain. Over these past 10 years, the impact of the Act has been assessed and reported upon by Congress, by the responsible departments, and by associations of the disabled. With differing emphasis, it has generally been regarded by all as positive for the disabled community. There are undoubtedly some gaps, but what has been appreciated above all is the new impetus injected into activites carried out for the benefit of the community as well as the overall vision of all the problems and possible solutions. This is the first time that such an overall approach has been taken in Spain.

We must look to the future. As other delegations have noted, we must articulate a new strategy for the 1990s. As we think of the future we must learn the lessons of the past decade. Above all, we need a realistic policy that will take into account and attempt to respond to the needs and aspirations of disabled persons. Those aspirations include the demand for justice and equal rights and opportunities in order to develop their lives to the fullest potential.

In recognition of the specific nature of each disability, Spain's strategy to the year 2000 will step up activities in the spheres of prevention, rehabilitation, equalization of opportunities and economic and legal protection, taking into particular account the groups at highest risk.

As the coordinator of Government social policies for disabled persons, the Ministry for Social Affairs is preparing an integrated programme of action which - in line with the process of European integration and the recommendations of the United Nations - will define priorities, objectives and goals, general procedures and specific measures, and the resources required to meet the needs of the disabled community in the coming decade. Its activities will be placed in an overall context that takes into account the fact that a disabled person is first and foremost a citizen like any other.

The challenge is to move on from protection, which creates dependency, to social integration, which is liberating and productive. This new approach will be based on the philosophy of the disabled community, that of living independently: with guaranteed entitlements and appropriate and sufficient opportunities, the individual and the community will be freed of false guardianship and will be able freely to choose their future and control the processes affecting them.

For the disabled person, this philosophy requires provision of the full potential of rehabilitation measures with a view to achieving full, productive participation and/or maximum financial self-sufficiency. Advances in human sciences and new technologies will make major contributions to achieving this goal.

For society, promoting the independence of the disabled community is linked to due integration of disabled persons into the workforce, the elimination of prejudice and incorrect attitudes that serve as cultural barriers and lead to dependence and protectionism towards the disabled. We shall also focus on efforts to make communities more accessible and barrier-free, with transportation and other services adapted to the needs of the disabled, and with local authorities made sensitive to all the problems facing disabled persons.

In short, our aim is the integration and active participation of these citizens, but with a change in strategy: in the coming decade, we shall be targeting society at large, not merely the disabled community, for integration involves both.

Mr. AL-GHANEM (Saudi Arabia) (interpretation from Arabic): Please allow me to condole with the brotherly people of Egypt over the catastrophe of the day before yesterday. We ask Almighty God to enable those who have lost their near and dear to bear the loss and we declare our solidarity with the Arab Republic of Egypt.

I have been listening, since yesterday morning, to the statements of the distinguished delegates who have spoken on the problems of the disabled. In all those statements these has been the unanimous call for serious work on behalf of the disabled. However, all of this is repetitious; we, the disabled, have been hearing this for over 20 years in conferences and meetings.

The General Assembly is right to mark the end of the Decade of Disabled Persons. But what happens next? What happens after all the statements have been made? Have we satisfied ourselves and done our duty by the 500 million disabled persons, 80 per cent of whom live in developing countries? Have we really worked to eliminate the causes of disability? Have we worked to prevent the disabilities caused by armed conflict, ignorance, disease and poverty? The General Assembly is considering these questions for the first time.

I turn now to the problems of the disabled in my own country. In 1975 I contacted the Minister for Education. At the time, it was King Fahd bin Abdulaziz. He ordered the establishment of an institute for the blind. He set up a full budget for establishing institutions for the disabled. A department within that Ministry of Education dealt with the problems of the disabled, and institutes for the blind, the deaf and the mentally deficient were set up throughout the country. The Minister said, "We are going to help the disabled, because the disabled are human beings and deserve civil rights; they deserve our assistance because of the laws and principles of Islam".

For more than 30 years, King Fahd bin Abdulazis Al-Saud has continued to support the disabled. He helped establish the regional office of the Middle East Committee for Disabled Persons. The voice of the blind is now heard throughout the world.

(Mr. Al-Ghanem, Saudi Arabia)

I have given you this summary of what is happening in Saudi Arabia because I want to ask other Governments that have failed to show an interest in the disabled to learn a lesson from the actions of King Fahd and to follow his example, one that could well be a model for the whole of mankind.

We in Saudi Arabia have participated in all the meetings and symposia held in the course of the International Year of Disabled Persons and I have represented the Kingdom in every one of them. In 1982, King Fahd delegated me to discuss the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. We have played a very important role in discussing its recommendations and in the deliberations of the Decade.

In that context, we faced certain objections from some countries. It is strange indeed that those who opposed us in 1982 now support the Decade and its achievements and all that we did throughout the Decade.

The Decade has heightened awareness but, unfortunately, has had little practical result. We must be realistic: I have taken note of the Secretary-General's report (document A/47/415), which is very frank and very lucid. The report states the facts and crosses the t's. It speaks of Governments that have not formulated any policies and have not helped the disabled. It also speaks of Governments that have announced the adoption of policies but have never translated those declared intentions into facts. These are all facts, and we must know them. It is high time we began truly to work on behalf of the disabled in deed and not in name.

Disability is linked to economic factors. If a country's economy improves, its disabled citizens receive better care. These are facts. But do Governments in the developing countries have sympathy for the disabled and want to help the disabled? Is there any acceptance of the fact that a disabled person has the same rights *vis-à-vis* his community as the other, normal, members of society? Is that really accepted by Governments? These are facts.

As I said yesterday, we are not here to solicit pity or ask for charity. We are here to demand our legitimate rights, the rights due us in our societies and in our communities. A society's development can be measured by the quality and type of treatment it provides for its disabled and by the way it deals with all social issues.

This is a human issue that has the status of a sacred message. We the disabled have come here, for the first time, to address the General Assembly so that our voices may be heard all over the world. We are here to claim our rights. We want jobs. We want equality of employment. What does "equality" mean? Equality shall become a reality if a proper strategy to achieve it were formulated on the basis of carefully considered and properly weighed principles and on goodwill on the part of Governments. There are some 180 million children who do not have enough food or drink. There are 40 million children who face blindness and disability because of vitamin A deficiency. These are facts. At the beginning of the Decade there were 450 million disabled persons. Their numbers now have risen to 500 million and will go on increasing unless the causes of disability are dealt with. I have not heard one single speaker of the many who have spoken since yesterday speak of the causes of disability or of the prevention of disability. Ninety-nine per cent of the disabilities caused by accidents, if treated in timely fashion, can be prevented. We must stress these facts and never lose sight of these realities.

I want every person in this hall to bear in mind that the disabled have the same rights in society and that if they are given the proper chance through access to modern technology, they can be of great benefit to society. That door must be opened to them.

Mr. VASILYEV (Belarus)(interpretation from Russian): The delegation of the Republic of Belarus attaches great importance to the assessment of the results of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons and to the formulation of the programme of action for the future. We welcome the specific recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report (A/47/415) on moving, in the context of the United Nations programme on disability, from measures for disseminating information and consciousness-raising to practical action. In that connection, I should like to point out that many of the measures suggested in the report are already being implemented in Belarus and are being made part of our national State policy for the disabled.

Unfortunately, owing to the complicated economic, social and environmental situation in our country, the number of disabled persons is increasing faster than the number of workers. As of January 1991 more than 348,000 disabled persons, amounting to about 3.4 per cent of the total population, were registered with social-welfare organs. In the past five years that number has risen by 32,300 persons, that is, by 10 per cent.

In the Republic of Belarus we are now establishing a fairly strong legal basis for resolving problems connected with improving the status of disabled persons. Legislative action to deal with the problems of disability is being taken in two main areas: first, the adoption of special comprehensive laws and, secondly, consideration given to the needs of the disabled in laws

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covering specific questions, including those relating to industry; examples are the laws of Belarus on employment and on pensions and special provisions of tax legislation.

Pursuant to a recommendation contained in the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, on 11 November 1991 the Supreme Soviet adopted a comprehensive Act on the Social Defence of Disabled Persons in the Republic of Belarus. The Act establishes the main lines of national State policy with regard to the disabled and seeks to implement effective measures for disability prevention, the rehabilitation of disabled persons, guarantees of equality and equal participation by the disabled in society. Social policies for the disabled have heretofore been based on providing material compensation. They disregarded the disabled person's remaining opportunities and capacity for work. That approach was not conducive to the full integration of the disabled into society. The new Act requires the State organs of the Republic of Belarus to provide an education, vocational training and job placement for the disabled. The Act is based on the universal recognition of the human rights of disabled persons, who are, first and foremost, citizens of the Republic of Belarus, with rights and duties equal to those of other citizens, and are only secondarily beneficiaries of social services.

According to the Act, disabled persons enjoy all the socio-economic and personal rights and freedoms enshrined in the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons adopted by the General Assembly, in the Constitution of Belarus and in other legislation.

(Mr. Vasilyev, Belarus)

Disabled persons have an inalienable right to respect for their human dignity. Discrimination against the disabled is prohibited and prosecutable. The draft new constitution of Belarus establishes the right of its citizens to disability benefits.

The task of the interdepartmental council being established in Belarus for dealing with the problems of the disabled is to ensure proper coordination of national policies for improving the status of disabled persons and to work out concerted action aimed at implementing the provisions of the Act. That is also the goal of the Republic's comprehensive programme, now in preparation, on the problems of disability for the years 1994 to 2000. It envisages three main areas: prevention, rehabilitation and equalization of opportunity.

In the Republic of Belarus, disabled persons participate, as members of the Supreme Soviet, in the process of elaborating and adopting laws relating to the disabled and, as civil servants, in the procedure for implementing those laws. Moreover, disabled persons in our country are also active in non-governmental organizations. A new public organization, the Belarus Association of Disabled Persons, was recently admitted to the International Federation of Disabled Persons. A charity and health fund has been established. Associations of the blind and the deaf are currently active. But because of our difficult economic situation, Belarus organizations of disabled persons are in urgent need of external financial and material assistance and consultative services on questions of disability at both State and non-governmental levels.

The report of the Secretary-General addresses the results of the work of the regional commissions in identifying common causes of disability throughout the world, which include poverty, disease, armed conflict, accidents and

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ageing. We believe that another important factor should be added to this list: the environmental one. For Belarus, this means the concrete problem of eliminating the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear-power-station accident, which has affected one of every five citizens of Belarus. There has been a dramatic 60 per cent increase in oncological disease, particularly thyroid cancer among children. More than half of all school-age children exposed to radioactive contamination have been found to suffer from disorders of the cardiovascular system. It is thus quite understandable that in our legislation the concept of disability prevention includes measures to ensure environmental safety. For that reason, we believe that the work of the United Nations to improve the status of disabled persons should be closely coordinated with the actions of the international community to implement the General Assembly resolutions on strengthening international cooperation and coordinating efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the effects of the Chernobyl accident.

We should like to mention a number of points that, in our view, will facilitate a more successful solution of the problems confronting the international community with regard to the prevention of disability, the rehabilitation of disabled persons and the equalization of opportunity. In particular, we wish to draw attention to the following priority measures: improved coordination of activities; finalization of a long-term strategy to the year 2000 and beyond to provide assistance to the decision-making bodies of the United Nations system in taking action to improve the status of the disabled; publication of the text of standard norms for guaranteeing equal opportunity for disabled persons; provision of highly effective information at the national and regional levels in important areas of policy concerning the disabled; expansion of the range of topics for scientific and applied research, with mandatory participation by associations of disabled persons; enhancement of the role of organizations of the disabled in the decision-making process at the national and international levels; and increased participation by disabled women, who are often the victims of sex discrimination.

The basic element of the World Programme of Action is, we believe, its recognition of the human rights of the disabled. Accordingly, it would be a good idea to consider at the World Conference on Human Rights, the question of the human rights of the disabled. We also support the initiative of the Special Representative of the United Nations to establish an international fund and an international centre for the disabled, which we consider important for a more effective coordination of activities in the interests of the disabled throughout the world.

In conclusion, our delegation wishes to declare its full support for the draft resolution contained in document A/47/L.4.

Mr. MAYORGA CORTES (Nicaragua) (interpretation from Spanish): At the outset, we wish to thank Minister Robert de Cotret of Canada for his statement yesterday in which he summarized the principal results of the Ministerial Meeting held in Montreal on 8 and 9 October. The interest manifested in this meeting by the large number of attending Ministers, the frankness of the exchange of views, and the decision to establish a Ministerial Working Group to follow up on the issue now before us highlight the importance of again placing the issue of national and international action to benefit the disabled at the top of our agenda.

One of the major conclusions of the Secretary-General's report on this issue is that it will not be possible to achieve the objectives of the World Programme of Action concerning the Disabled without increasing the resources available for international cooperation, whether bilateral or multilateral, beyond existing levels. Speaking realistically, the Secretary-General also notes that, in the face of the slow progress of activities in the area of prevention and rehabilitation of the disabled as well as of equalization of opportunity, there is the danger that, if the current worsening trends in the economic and social situation of the developing countries persist, the disabled may find themselves even more marginalized in society if no special assistance is given to them.

The lack of resources is consequently a serious limiting factor. However, in our view, of equal importance is the conviction and determination of our own countries about the need to devise timely and effective measures in terms of policy, programmes, and services for the disabled, especially in the areas of special education, employment, social services, urban planning, social security, taxation policies, transport, and culture and sport.

In this respect, we wish to stress at the outset the critical role that the political will of States is playing and the complementary importance of bolstering the functions of prevention, coordination, supervision, training, and information exchange, which are the responsibilities of the United Nations. In short, better and more effective national and international organization is now required if we are to move on from consciousness-raising to action. However, it must be recognized that the process of awareness and

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consciousness-raising in our societies also needs to be further stepped up, abandoning paternalistic approaches that underestimate the true potential and capacities of the disabled in all aspects of life or which fail to recognize the central role that they themselves should be playing as actors in the process of fundamentally changing attitudes in our societies.

(Mr. Mayorga Cortes, Nicaragua)

As many speakers have already said, developing countries must make great advances in the socio-economic sphere, especially in combating poverty, in order to be in a better position to accelerate their activities for the disabled. But this should not be an excuse for us to shirk our responsibilities in this area or delay shouldering them. In fact, we cannot be either complacent or frustrated. We must pool all our capacity for action, and on an urgent basis. I stress this urgency.

We agree with Mr. Malinga of Disabled Peoples International, who said yesterday that the liberation of the disabled can come about only through their own organizations and their own efforts, and that disability is a valid issue of human rights of citizens in the full meaning of the term - citizens, not clients of particular social-service agencies. Mr. Malinga also noted that so long as our societies remain hostile and inaccessible to the problems of the disabled, and so long as the disabled feel marginalized, oppressed, discriminated against or exploited, they have the primary responsibility to organize themselves to remove the social, architectural, cultural, environmental and attitudinal barriers that impede them. They are not fighting for privileges; they are fighting to enjoy the same rights as other members of society. Listening to Mr. Malinga, one reaches the conclusion that it is not really the disabled who require rehabilitation, but our societies. These also need to be made healthy - not necessarily physically, but spiritually and psychologically, which is often as important as or more important than the first. Public and private agencies working in this field should review their approaches and procedures, update their working methods, target their programmes and give priority and urgency to their activities.

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For all those reasons, we firmly support Mr. Malinga's seven proposals aimed at surmounting the main conceptual and institutional obstacles to truly timely and effective national and international action.

In the United Nations context, we stress the importance of the following elements of action for the period 1993 to 2002:

First, in order to support appropriately the implementation of the World Programme of Action, the long-term strategy and the standard rules on the equalization of opportunities, we must devise and put into effect an integrated, coordinated approach by the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme, the International Labour Organisation and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Second, it is necessary to strengthen the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Promotion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons and heed the proposal of the World Committee for the Decade that we establish an agency or organization endowed with the human and financial resources it needs to do its in for the coming decade. We also support the suggestion of the Chairman of that Committee, Mr. Alan Reich, that pending the establishment of such machinery the Secretary-General should constantly exercise his moral leadership with a view to inspiring further action by Heads of State or Government in this area.

Third, it is necessary to step up the work of the regional economic and social Commissions in preparing plans of action for the various parts of the world, including the proclamation of regional decades like the one declared in the region of Asia and the Pacific.

Fourth, it is vitally important to bolster and enhance the effectiveness of interinstitutional and consultative machinery among United Nations bodies and between them and the non-governmental organizations. International non-governmental organizations are legitimate and crucial partners in the vast tasks ahead of us, and their active participation should be encouraged.

Fifth, the following must be of high priority: special education for disabled persons; the development and execution of programmes for the training of trainers; and the specific needs of children, women and the elderly.

Sixth, the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs at the United Nations Office at Vienna should be strengthened, so it can, *inter alia*, give due support to organizing national coordinating committees and other organs, and to their work.

Seventh, recognizing the work of the former Department of Technical Cooperation for Development in helping countries formulate and carry out programmes for the disabled, we encourage the new Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Development to intensify the work of the support group set up in line with resolution 45/91 and, in general, to maintain an active presence *vis-à-vis* the question of the disabled.

Eighth, we firmly support the continuation beyond the Decade of the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. We agree with the Secretary-General that the Fund has been of direct benefit to grass-roots initiatives and that it has made a significant contribution to United Nations activities for the disabled. In that context, we also view as timely the Secretary-General's proposal to give a new mandate to the Fund; this should be considered by the Economic and Social Council.

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Ninth, we support China's proposal that the question of the disabled should appear on the agenda of the summit on social development to be held in 1995. This should not preclude the convening of a United Nations world conference on this subject in the next two or three years, as suggested by the World Committee chaired by Mr. Reich. The item, of course, is mandatory for the coming world conferences on human rights and on women.

Without diminishing the importance of integrated rehabilitation and equal opportunities, I want to stress the overriding importance for developing countries of the adoption of measures to prevent disabilities and eliminate those that can be treated at low cost.

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In the first case, in accordance with the second Leeds Castle Declaration of 1991, it is estimated that with appropriate action it would be possible to prevent some 30 million human beings from becoming disabled in the decade 1993-2002 and that close to 70 million might be able to surmount their disabilities by means of relatively low-cost medical intervention. Can the world possibly remain impassive in the light of those statistics and their promise for the future? There is no doubt that this field of action is a priority, and we must pool our efforts to address it.

Taking into account the fact that disease and war are significant causes of disability in developing countries, we should like to note that in the former case, disease, much can be done to coordinate ongoing scientific research in the developed countries, as well as to share that research between developed and developing countries. The exchange of experience is still extremely limited, and there is a need to identify and target priority areas that have proved promising for research. There has been insufficient cross-referencing of the results of research being done in the areas of genetics, organ transplants, the impact of environmental degradation on health and the quest for solutions to the terrible tragedy of AIDS, as well as with regard to other scientific investigations into such diseases as arthritis, multiple sclerosis and cerebral palsy, to mention only a few of the diseases that continue to resist science. The timely and widespread dissemination of the results of such research and the systematic exchange of scientific information should be key components of the international action to be undertaken in the decade 1993-2002.

Nicaragua has experienced the evils of war at first hand, and we continue to confront its aftermaths. One of the most significant results has, of course, been the number of disabled persons as a result of the conflict, a number estimated at approximately 16,000, most of whom are young people, children and women. Their present and future status is of extreme concern to my Government.

Nicaragua is a country with a disability incidence that is much higher than the average in other developing countries. It is estimated that approximately 10 per cent of our population is affected by some form of disability. Given the inaccuracy of available statistics and the problems created by the aftermath of war, we are certain that that figure is a significant underestimation of the true state of affairs. Together with the problems generated by poverty, malnutrition, accidents, diseases and other causes, in Nicaragua war - as I have already noted - has left a painful legacy of disability. The war-disabled are being given priority by the Government, but we should like to work out an overall approach to the problem.

The World Health Organization estimates that of the 390,000 disabled persons in Nicaragua, the majority of whom are women, 84 per cent have physical or motor-related limitations, 8 per cent suffer from mental illness, 4 per cent suffer from sensory deprivation and an another 4 per cent suffer from neurological disabilities or a work-related disability. Many of the disabled are also victims of drug addiction, which makes the situation even more complex.

Article 62 of the Republic's Constitution establishes that:

> "The State shall strive to establish programmes to benefit disabled persons leading to their physical, psychological and social rehabilitation and their reintegration into the workforce."

The principal body responsible for preparing and executing such programmes is the Nicaraguan Institute of Social Security and Wellbeing, which has

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undertaken a wide range of income- and/or employment-generating activities for disabled persons and which, in coordination with the Nicaraguan National Commission for Rehabilitation, has carried out restricted training programmes through a number of occupational workshops. None the less, there is a need to expand such activities and promote more permament institutional frameworks.

In February of this year two institutes providing care for the 97,000 direct victims of the war - including the 16,000 persons disabled as a result of that tragedy - were merged. The National Commission for Support to Veterans and the Nicaraguan Repatriation Institute ceased to exist and were combined under the Nicaraguan Institute of Social Security and Wellbeing as the Department for Care for War Victims.

On 14 February of this year the First National Meeting of War Disabled for Peace, Reconciliation and Development was held. On that occasion the Government made specific proposals in the areas of employment, education, health and well-being, transport, culture and sport. The proposals were debated at some length by the competent bodies, both public and private. For their part, the participants made their own suggestions and proposals on such subjects as the allocation of appropriate financial resources for more effective action, vocational training, housing, participation in the process of privatization being undertaken in the country, taxation policy, urban transport, employment of women disabled as a result of the war, recreation, special education and the strengthening of the National Health System to benefit the disabled. The results of the Meeting have helped to clarify the policies and action of the Government in this area. However, all of this must be tackled within very tight financial constraints.

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Also in February of this year the Government of Nicaragua, under the terms of Decree No. 7-92, set up the Institute for Care to War Victims (INVICTA), within the purview of the Programme for National Reconciliation and Rehabilitation, the keystone of President Chamorro's governmental programme. The Institute functions as a department of the Ministry of the Presidency. INVICTA is an initiative designed to foster widespread cooperation and understanding among disabled veterans of the resistance and the military, who in the past decade waged a devastating war in Nicaragua. Its creation is valuable testimony to the process of healing and growing domestic solidarity that is ongoing in Nicaragua, notwithstanding the difficulties still facing us. Recently, to carry out the Institute's various activities a project with specific sub-projects was drawn up and budgeted at $11.9 million, and this has been submitted to the international community for consideration.

Timely and proper attention to the needs of the disabled is of critical importance in Nicaragua, as it is in all the developing countries. After all, 85 per cent of the world's 500 million disabled live in those countries. We are confident that our countries, the United Nations and the private sector can work together to build upon and expand the action initiated during the Decade to which we are now bidding farewell. However, we must not lose sight of the sense of urgency, the need for creativity, the new requirements in terms of organization and greater participation by the disabled themselves, all factors that are more and acute and pressing today than ever before. If we bear those factors in mind as we approach our work, our endeavours will undoubtedly be successful.

Mr. GHAFOORZAI (Afghanistan): At the outset, I should like to express my delegation's deepest sympathy and condolences to the delegation of the Arab Republic of Egypt and, through it, to the people and the Government of Egypt, on the loss of life and destruction of property Egypt has suffered as a result of the devastating earthquake that struck Cairo.

While we are marking the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons and evaluating its achievements, the number of persons with disability has increased over the course of the Decade, especially in war-stricken countries such as Afghanistan. We believe, as is also reflected in the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in document A/47/415, that disability remains a great challenge that must be addressed seriously.

My delegation has studied with great interest the report of the Secretary-General and congratulates His Excellency on the important contribution of the United Nations to the achievements of the Decade of Disabled Persons. I would also like to express my delegation's thanks and gratitude to all the international, governmental and non-governmental bodies for their valuable work carried out during the Decade.

This occasion gives the delegation of the Islamic State of Afghanistan a good opportunity to bring to the attention of the international community the gravity of the disabilities facing Afghan society. General Assembly resolution 45/91 of 14 December 1990, through which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to shift the focus of the United Nations Programme on disability from that of awareness-raising to action, has immense importance for the Islamic State of Afghanistan. Afghanistan, a war-stricken country, has inherited more than 2 million disabled persons - I repeat, 2 million disabled persons - as a legacy of aggression and an imposed 14-year

(Mr. Ghafoorzai, Afghanistan)

war. Disability, in the magnitude that exists in Afghanistan, literally disables the entire nation. Our need is urgent and our appeal is for quick action. The extent of the devastation that Afghanistan has suffered is best portrayed in a paragraph from the recent "Consolidated Appeal by His Excellency the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Emergency Humanitarian Assistance for Afghanistan", as follows:

> "Few countries in history have suffered to the extent Afghanistan has over the past 14 years. Aside from the physical destruction, which was often nothing short of cataclysmic, the results of the war include over a million people killed, over 2 million disabled, nearly 6 million refugees in neighbouring countries, and 2 million internally displaced persons."

Unfortunately, the disabled population of Afghanistan is not decreasing, but owing to the indiscriminate mining of the entire country with over 10 million mines, the toll is increasing at an ominously high rate. The refugees returning home after 14 years of hardship are often greeted by land mines, which most often maim them and force their return to the overcrowded border medical facilities.

Indeed, it is ironic that the international community is celebrating the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons while in my country, the problem facing Afghan society of more than 2 million disabled persons - the highest number in a single country - is an acute national disaster. I believe that this problem in Afghanistan is closely linked to the overall strategy of economic and social rehabilitation of the country. Therefore, we earnestly call upon the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs at the United Nations Office at Vienna and other international bodies to extend technical assistance to the Government of Afghanistan in preparing a report on

(Mr. Ghafoorzai, Afghanistan)

the extent of disability in our country, which could serve as a solid foundation for future programmes for the rehabilitation of the Afghan disabled population and its integration into the active workforce and the reconstruction of the country.

Providing the multitude of disabled persons in Afghanistan with an opportunity to become as self-sufficient as possible is imperative for the realization of a successful programme for the self-sufficiency of the disabled population, allowing the remaining segments of the workforce to concentrate on the rebuilding projects. To reach that level of self-sufficiency, it is necessary to include in the programme for disabled persons primary health care, nutrition, immunization, and other preventive measures, as well as rehabilitation programmes, technical aid and appliances, education facilities, and vocational training.

Afghanistan's disabled population cannot expect any equality of opportunity when the vast majority of medical facilities in the country is either completely inactive or functioning with less than adequate resources. The expected increase in the number of disabled in Afghanistan is due not only to lack of proper medical facilities and medicine which could prevent a disease from becoming incapacitating, but also to such deprivations as malnutrition, especially among children, and lack of clean drinking water owing to the destruction of drinking-water facilities and the pollution of water supplies as a result of 14 years of war.

As the Foreign Minister of the Islamic State of Afghanistan pointed out in his 30 September 1992 statement to the General Assembly, with its multitude of problems and its limited capabilities Afghanistan cannot alone address the critical needs of disabled persons. He stressed the priority of constructing new hospitals and clinics as a prerequisite for the initiation of rehabilitation programmes for disabled persons. The Foreign Minister added that all rehabilitation programmes need to be financed with international assistance.

While praising the efforts of the United Nations Office at Vienna and the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs in adopting principles aimed at ensuring the implementation of measures and a monitoring system for the rights of disabled persons, I should mention that the problem in Afghanistan is of a different nature. Our country needs to create appropriate national machinery to support almost 2 million persons disabled as a result of armed conflict. Without appropriate international assistance, this objective cannot be achieved.

My delegation, aware of the seriousness of problems related to disability and the important tasks ahead in this respect, supports the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General and welcomes the note by the Secretary-General (A/47/214) calling for continuation of the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons.

On the regional level, recently the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) proclaimed the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, which deserves our appreciation.

(Mr. Ghafoorzai, Afghanistan)

Also, the World Committee for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons deserves our appreciation for calling on the United Nations to convene a United Nations world conference on disability by 1995 and establish a United Nations disability agency sufficient to meet the enormous challenge of implementing the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons; moreover, until such a United Nations agency is established, the Secretary-General should, on a continuing basis, assert his moral authority to inspire Heads of State and other world leaders to turn from "awareness-raising to action".

I would also like to congratulate the ad-hoc working group to establish standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for disabled persons on fulfilling its mandate.

It is hoped that the draft rules on equalization of opportunities recently approved by the ad hoc working group will be completed and submitted to the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly for adoption.

In conclusion, we believe that, despite the rich experience and the gains of the Decade, disability remains a serious challenge which requires comprehensive and more action-oriented programmes and strong commitment by Member States and concerned international bodies to the implementation of the World Programme of Action beyond the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. Afghanistan is a prime candidate for such action-oriented programmes, and we hope that, given the magnitude of the problem of the disabled in Afghanistan, we will be placed on the priority list of the Programme concerning disabled persons for the period 1993 to 2002.

Mr. KHALIL (Syrian Arab Republic) (interpretation from Arabic): I wish to condole with to the people of Egypt with respect to the major earthquake that has struck their capital city, Cairo, and extend to them my country's sympathy and solidarity.

It is a great honour and privilege for me to represent the Syrian Arab Republic before this Assembly, on which millions of disabled persons have pinned their hopes of equality with others seeking employment opportunities that would ensure for them self-reliance, independence and dignity in communities that really care for them and address their problems. The disabled will continue to be a wasted human resource, unless society cares for them, rehabilitates them and integrates them into its mainstream of life.

In that context, I want to pay tribute to the Canadian Government and its Minister responsible for the disabled in preparing for the international conference on the disabled that was held at Montreal on 8 and 9 October this year. The Conference's conclusions and recommendations outline international machinery for financing and for exchanges of information and technology through the United Nations.

When the General Assembly declared 1981 the International Year of the Disabled, there were 450 million disabled persons in the world. Ten years later, that number has risen to 500 million. This makes it necessary for society to pay greater attention to the disabled and motivate public opinion to support the disabled and deal with their problems in a manner that would have a positive impact on their present and future lives through a determined effort to find the reasons behind the increase in the numbers of the disabled and to deal with the causes of that increase.

When the General Assembly declared 1981 the International Year of Disabled Persons, its aim was to heighten public awareness of this problem and

(Mr. Khalil, Syrian Arab Republic)

urge the competent authorities to do more in the field of rehabilitation and the prevention of disabilities, all under the banner of "Full participation and equality".

Cooperation, fraternity, a sense of responsibility to defend the rights of others are incumbent upon us all, and not for reasons of pity or charity. The goal of these meetings, as outlined in the documents before us, is to discuss the present conditions of the disabled, review what has been done for them in the framework of the Decade and explore the possibilities of establishing a world plan of action to provide care for the disabled, rehabilitation and equality with others in employment opportunities. As we stand on the threshold of a new world decade of the disabled the objective should be to define clearly rights and obligations. The person with a mental or physical disability is, before all, a citizen of a democratic society that respects all social and human values and provides equal opportunities to all its members, as a right, not out of motives of charity. Disabled persons should participate in the planning and follow-up of programmes that concern them.

(Mr. Khalil, Syrian Arab Republic)

Here, it might be in order to point out that the number of disabled persons in our country is 1,129, 30 per cent of whom are of school age. That number represents 1.076 per cent of the total population of Syria.

For 20 years my country, inspired by the wise guidance of President Hafiz Al Assad, has taken action to arrive at effective solutions to the problems of disabled persons within the limitations fixed by our national resources. Fourteen institutes for the disabled have been set up in all provinces under the supervision of the Ministry of Social and Labour Affairs, four for teaching the deaf, two for teaching the blind, two for the physically handicapped, one vocational training centre for the handicapped, four for the mentally retarded and one for paralyzed children. In addition, two more schools for the mentally retarded will be opened this year. Five day-schools for the same category and a further vocational training centre are in the pipeline. We hope to be able, in the near future, to increase the number of institutions for the mentally retarded and physically handicapped so as to cover all the provinces and meet all existing needs within our limited resources.

As for job opportunities for the disabled, our labour laws stipulate that the disabled should represent 2 per cent of the total labour force in the private sector and 4 per cent in the public sector. The Ministry of Social and Labour Affairs has submitted a draft law to the competent authorities calling for an increase in that proportion to 6 per cent of the total labour force.

I hope that all the United Nations will undertake all practical follow-up measures with regard to the care, rehabilitation and training of the disabled throughout the world and that serious and construction action will be taken to reduce the causes of disability. In addition, we must ensure the financial and technological resources necessary and bring about an exchange of information through working groups.

In conclusion, I should like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General for his report (A/47/415) on the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, and to the important conclusions and recommendations therein.

Mr. ARAOZ (Argentina)(interpretation from Spanish): It is with great pleasure that I take part in this debate marking the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons and express the recognition of the Argentine Republic and its appreciation to all the institutions and officials, and to the international community as represented here, for the concern shown in favour of the disabled throughout the world.

I wish to acknowledge in particular the appropriate initiative of the Government of Canada in convening the earlier meeting of responsible ministers in this area, which was held at Montreal and which provided an opportunity for direct communication among those in charge of ensuring prevention, rehabilitation and equality of opportunities for the disabled in all countries. To that earlier commitment we add today in the General Assembly the firm resolve of my country to continue its participation in such meetings in order to make progress at the multilateral level towards increasingly effective solutions to the problems that bring us together here today.

Throughout the debate it has been clear that there is a close link between disability and social policies that respond to the tragedy of poverty, inequality and the lack of a minimum standard for a decent life. That is why I want to emphasize that all efforts specifically designed to help the disabled must be made within the framework of what each country and the international community as a whole are doing to achieve a more just and, therefore, more humane, society. Perhaps the convening of a world summit on social development, which my country fully endorses, is the best means of finding solutions for the disabled - and that would be one of the various problems to be addressed at such a meeting - and it would be a sign that all peoples were to be involved. All the disabled will obtain full equality of opportunities when the population of a given society as a whole has access to a dignified lifestyle, to employment, to education, to health care and to full respect for human rights - in a word, to the individual's greatest possible fulfilment within an organized community.

Those aspirations will become realities only if every initiative is action-oriented and does not remain mere verbiage contained in compilations of international instruments. During the Decade now drawing to a close Argentina has made efforts to discharge its responsibility by taking realistic and effective steps in that direction. As evidence of such compliance we will deposit with the Secretariat the legal body of laws, decrees, regulations, resolutions and programmes undertaken to develop solutions to the question. But these achievements should not lead to complacency, for where the rights of the disabled are concerned we may indeed be moving in the right direction but there are always new goals to be reached.

In this connection the more we do, the more we should continue to do, because the very development of rehabilitation poses challenges to the policy of integration and equality of opportunities. The Argentine Republic has endorsed declarations on this issue, and it has also adhered wholeheartedly to them as an expression of our society as a whole and not of our Government officials alone. In that sense the international declarations reflect a level of universal ethical awareness of the issue and are the basis for specific action against discrimination and for the fullest possible integration of all people affected by disabilities into the life of the community.

In that connection we already adhere to the draft standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for disabled persons that may achieve consensus in the specialized agencies, such a procedure implying as it does the willingness to set common goals, to coordinate efforts and to guide international cooperation. However, after the successful Decade established by the United Nations, and after all the statements delivered and efforts made to lay unified foundations, we feel that we must now prepare the way to draft an international convention on the rights of disabled persons, one that could, at the highest level of legal commitment, ensure for all the disabled a social and political response commensurate with the declarations and consensus reached so far. We must move from the strictly episodic stage of fighting against all discrimination to the stage of positive affirmation of all our rights. It is true that much remains to be done with regard to discrimination against the disabled, but that must not prevent us from developing a legal system that guarantees special rights for people with special needs, for where there is a need, a right is born.

In conclusion, I should like to express my Government's firm commitment to join the international community in all efforts aimed at the constant development of human society though the contribution of each of its members. Those whom we call disabled cannot be excluded from this task, because we need them - their capabilities, their willingness to work, their solidarity - to build a more equitable world in which the dignity and worth of the human being are respected and treasured and take precedence over any differences or conditions.

Mr. ADALA (Kenya): First of all, on behalf of my delegation, may I extend our sympathy to the Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt and through him to the Government and people of Egypt on their sad loss.

As we come to the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, many of us will agree that the Decade served a useful purpose in bringing about worldwide public awareness and that it led to an improved understanding of disability. This was indeed one of the objectives of the Decade. The initiatives taken by disabled persons themselves, especially in activities such as sports and rehabilitation, have also been very encouraging. We commend all, whether individuals, institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations, or the United Nations system and its organs, for keeping the spirit of this campaign alive during the whole Decade. The challenges of turning this first step success into long-lasting reality will, however, depend on the achievement and sustainment of the goals we set for ourselves in the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons.

The World Committee for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons estimates that 85 per cent of the half-billion men, women and children who have disabilities - physical or mental impairments that interfere with the major task of living - are found in developing countries, where they are doubly disadvantaged; by poverty and disability. Our Secretary-General underscores the point in his report with the observation that current economic and social deterioration, marked by low-growth rates, high unemployment, reduced public expenditure, current structural adjustment programmes and privatization, have negatively affected programmes and services for disabled pesons in both developing and developed countries.

The Government and the people of Kenya, under the leadership of His Excellency President Daniel Arap Moi, have striven over the years to create a positive image through education and by improving the conditions of persons with disabilities. Special institutions for teaching disabled persons, vocational rehabilitation centres for training in skills, and several thousand individuals - disabled persons and their families - have been assisted through a National Trust Fund established in 1980 by the Head of State. Our main goal has been to achieve development and secure opportunities that can allow the integration of disabled into society and make them self-reliant.

The Government of Kenya is therefore doing its utmost to further the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons as envisaged by the World Committee for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. First, our Head of State spearheaded a nationwide fund-raising campaign. It collected over $2 million, which is now being used in activities beneficial to the disabled, thus turning awareness into action. Second, the Government of Kenya has increased the participation of persons with disabilites in social, cultural, religious, recreational and community life, and in decision-making at various levels. Third, education, training,

(Mr. Adala, Kenya)

rehabilitation, and job opportunities are being expanded. Fourth, equalization of opportunities is one of our main objectives. This has been achieved to a certain degree by removing many barriers - attitudinal, architectural, transportation and communications, and legal. Fifth, through health education, mother-and-child-care services countrywide, expanded immunization and the progressive improvement of environmental, occupational and other health programmes, the Government aims at preventing disabling disease and conditions. Sixth, Kenya stands head and shoulders above many developing countries in expanded community-based rehabilitation services and self-help programmes involving people with disabilities and their family members. Seventh, our self-help programmes involve everyone - disabled and non-disabled, rich and poor, young and old, men and women - in cooperative efforts directed at conquering or preventing disability and releasing human potential for the benefit of all.

It is the intention of the Kenya Government, as was recently announced by His Excellency President Daniel Arap Moi at the seventeenth World Congress of Rehabilitation International - which Kenya had the honour to host from 7 to 11 September this year - to support an application to the European Economic Community by the Association of the Physically Disabled of Kenya for funds to build a rehabilitation centre in Kenya. The Government has promised to donate a piece of land for this purpose. As was reported at this Congress, it has been found that many factors - direct or indirect - that cause disabilities in many developing countries, particularly in Africa, are preventable. These are factors such as diseases, overpopulation, environment degradation, drought, famine and internal civil strife. Owing to the socio-economic situations of the developing countries, however, they have been unable to alleviate some of these occurences.

(Mr. Adala, Kenya)

The Government and people of Kenya are grateful to the Danish Government, which in 1986 helped Kenya establish an institute of special education offering a two-year diploma course and short-time in-service training in special education. We thank the International Labour Organisation and the United Nations Development Programme, which, in collaboration with our Government, initiated a successful employment project for persons with disabilities. Kenya was, in 1984, the second country after India in the world to launch a Campaign on Prevention of Avoidable Disability (IMPACT) called for in the United Nations Programme of Action, as a priority programme.

(Mr. Adala, Kenya)

Since that time, one of our major programmes in this respect has been education on road safety, particularly among young people. That is our response based on the adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure".

In our efforts on this project we have received valuable support and great assistance from various bodies, including, to mention but a few, the Rotary Club, the Kenya Society of the Disabled, the Kenya Ear Foundation, the African Medical Research Foundation and the Association of the Physically Disabled of Kenya.

Kenya believes in the total integration of the disabled into society without marginalizing them in special groups requiring special treatment. We will continue to cooperate with the United Nations and other Member States in finding ways of achieving this goal. As the Decade has proved, given tools and opportunities, disabled persons can serve as a source of motivation for others and make a significant contribution to the development of their societies.

Mr. GALAL (Egypt) (interpretation from Arabic): I wish at the outset to express the deep appreciation of Egypt's Government, people and delegation of the warm sentiments and condolences expressed by representatives with respect to the earthquake that struck my country and that caused damage we have not yet been able fully to assess.

The fact that the General Assembly, at the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, is considering the question of the disabled, underlines anew the important role of the United Nations in achieving genuine social development through consideration of social issues with particular attention to the problems of vulnerable groups such as the disabled.

(Mr. Galal, Egypt)

That is clear proof of increased public awareness of the question of human rights in all its political, civil, social, economic and cultural dimensions.

To achieve effective results in the field of the care, protection and human development of the disabled, there must be coordination of the efforts of international specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations, in cooperation with international financing agencies. We urge the adoption of national programmes designed to achieve specific goals in line with international programmes and interim plans, and attach importance also to the coordination of regional programmes.

Egypt, as a developing country, faces well-known problems relating to its development needs. This is especially true at present, when we are engaged in a process of economic restructuring that, very naturally, affects the scope of our activities in the area of caring for the disabled and other groups. We hope that international cooperation will yield positive results with respect to caring for the disabled, particularly in terms of financing and resources, the exchange of scientific and technical information and the transfer of relevant technology.

The Egyptian family remains a social institution with deep roots. Therefore, the problems of the disabled are neither critical nor urgent in our case. But in the future it will be necessary to devote increased attention to this problem. Some Egyptian institutions and organizations have already established homes for the disabled providing comprehensive social and medical care.

(Mr. Galal, Egypt)

As the Secretary-General noted yesterday, war is one of the major causes of disability. The wars through which our entire region, and Egypt in particular, have gone make it incumbent upon us to give special attention to the disabled and war invalids by establishing institutions for the disabled, where they can be productive members of society and where they can have the opportunity to work, produce and engage in artistic and sportive activities.

One fact is clear from the documents before us: the situation of the disabled has improved during the Decade that comes to an end this year, thanks to the foundation laid by the Decade for the development of policies and programmes for the disabled on the basis of principles and an overall philosophy that have been agreed upon by the international community in line with the needs and requirements of every nation. Most developing countries have not received yet sufficient assistance in the areas of research and advanced information.

My delegation commends the information and the strategies set out in the principal documents of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons; these will form the principal foundations of United Nations programmes for the disabled in the post-Decade phase. Most prominent among those documents and principles are: the World Programme of Action, which outlines strong action-oriented policies; a long-term strategy that identifies specific tasks to be implemented within a certain time-frame; a set of standard rules on equalization of opportunities for the disabled. Those elements reflect the stage of progress achieved in developing programmes and objective rules with respect to disability.

To move the World Programme of Action from the phase of identifying goals and policies to the phase of implementing those policies, all Governments must completely review their policies and assistance programmes for the disabled and define comprehensive, coherent policies for integrating the disabled into all areas of life. Governments must also adopt long-term, positive national programmes of action for the period 1993 to 2002. Governments should incorporate their plans of action for the disabled in their national long-term and medium-term programmes and in their annual State budgets; they must establish a scale of priorities regarding the fields where funds are needed and provided.

With respect to the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, my delegation feels it must make the following observations:

First, the paucity of financial resources at the national level is the major obstacle to developing the required level of care for the disabled.

Secondly, developing countries still face severe economic and social problems that prevent them from adopting long-term strategies. Those countries, therefore, have settled for national medium-term plans with short-term objectives.

Thirdly, in view of the importance of the rights of the disabled, my country has enacted legislation to guarantee those rights by including in the labour laws stipulations of the right to work and the right to employment in Government bodies.

Fourthly, given the importance of equal attention to the rights of disabled women, the Egyptian disabled woman enjoys equal attention in programmes for governmental and non-governmental organizations.

My delegation would stress the importance of disability prevention through the peaceful solution of political conflicts in order to avoid the eruption of armed conflicts that would lead to an increased number of disabled in various regions of the world.

At the national level, my country has implemented national programmes for disability prevention through mother-and child-care services, accident prevention and the use of automated equipment and rehabilitation programmes.

At the regional level I would mention the importance of programmes carried out by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) with regard to the disabled. There is a need for international support for the ECA owing to the difficult economic conditions existing in Africa, so that the Commission may be able to develop further and increase its programmes

In conclusion, my delegation supports the proposal included in document A/47/214 of 18 May 1992 on the continuation of the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, taking into account the following: First, greater attention must be devoted to the disabled in the least-developed countries. Secondly, priority must be given to practicable programmes for the implementation of the World Programme of Action and its continuation after the end of the Decade. Thirdly, an appeal must be made to the developed countries to increase their donations to the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons so that it may be able to continue to provide its assistance.

Mr. MAKA (Zambia): May I begin by expressing my delegation's sympathy to the Government and the people of the Arab Republic of Egypt on the tragedy they recently suffered, which resulted in loss of life and property.

I am happy to contribute to our deliberations marking the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, a decade devoted to improving the welfare of disabled persons throughout the world. The celebration of the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons does not, in the view of my delegation, signify the end of international cooperation in this very important area. Instead, serving as a platform of reflection, the celebration of the conclusion of the Decade should re-energize all of us to enhance the welfare of disabled persons. This is the spirit in which I make my statement.

Before I proceed further, let me say that the Honourable Robert R. De Cotret, Secretary of State of Canada and the Minister Responsible for the Status of Disabled Persons, with whom I had the privilege to work as Vice-Chairman at the Montreal First Meeting of Ministers Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities, set the tone of our meeting. My colleague fully captured the issues raised and agreed upon in Montreal, and I am in full accord with his statement.

The commitment of Member States of the United Nations to the improvement of the status of the disabled prompted the General Assembly to adopt in December 1982 the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and also to proclaim the period 1983 to 1992 as the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. Through that action it was envisaged that the Member States and United Nations system would be able to implement the Programme of Action to the full benefit of those members of our society who have disabilities. The main focus was to be in areas of prevention and rehabilitation of disability and of guaranteeing equal opportunity for all disabled persons in all areas of human activity.

In Zambia, the only body that was responsible for the affairs of persons with disabilities was the Zambia Council for the Handicapped, established in 1968. Since 1982, the International Year of Disabled Persons, a number of associations of persons with disabilities have been formed. Seven of those associations have grouped together to form the Zambia Federation of the Disabled, which has affiliated itself to the Southern African Federation of the Disabled and also to Disabled People's International.

Various activities were carried out during the Decade, particularly preventive activities, namely, an immunization programme against measles, tetanus and polio. That programme was implemented throughout the country and especially in the rural areas. Also, primary health-care clinics were conducted to teach mothers proper feeding methods. Those two programmes have resulted in a reduction of such disabling diseases as blindness and polio. Persons with disabilities also became very active in representing their needs to the Government.

In my country, efforts are being made to encourage people with disabilities to advance in whatever field they wish to engage in. There are already persons with disabilities who are top civil servants, lecturers, doctors and businessmen. The policy of the Government is to create an enabling environment for persons with disabilities to succeed in whatever

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occupation they choose, even at the political level. Community-based rehabilitation, as opposed to institutional rehabilitation, is encouraged.

Income-generating projects are being worked out in collaboration with associations of disabled persons. The policy of the Government is to ask the associations to decide which projects could be carried out by people with disabilities, and the Government's duty is to assist in funding or finding sponsors. In the past, projects were designed for the disabled; those projects have not succeeded and have proved to be inappropriate in most cases.

(Mr. Maka, Zambia)

Last year, 1991, the Zambian Constitution was rewritten. People with disabilities presented their views regarding their rights as disabled persons. Under part III of the Constitution, the protection of human rights and the freedoms of the individual are covered in general terms. Such rights and freedoms extend fully to persons with disabilities. The Zambia Federation of the Disabled in partnership with the Government will organize a workshop on equalization of opportunities legislation before the end of the year.

The Zambia Associations of People with Disabilities have entered into fruitful partnerships with similar organizations outside Zambia. The Government is also working well with the movements of the disabled. We encourage people with disabilities to open partnerships with employers' associations, business associations, and trade unions.

The Zambian Government, through the Zambia Federation of the Disabled, will carry out a public education campaign through radio, television and local newspapers, and will continue these activities to increase public awareness of the objectives of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons. To achieve this, the Government will take deliberate steps towards formulating policies which will spell out the methods of handling issues concerning disabled persons.

I am glad to report here that my Ministry organized a national policy-formulating seminar in September this year where, among issues discussed, was the formulation of a national disability policy.

The Zambia Council for the Handicapped, the Zambia Federation of the Blind, and the Zambia Federation of the Disabled were also invited to this important seminar to assist by providing their inputs to this policy, together with organizations and agencies whose fields of specialization require involvement in such activities.

(Mr. Maka, Zambia)

The World Programme of Action, as adopted by the General Assembly, constitutes an international long-term plan based on extensive consultations, and I would like my Ministry to pursue this kind of approach so that the Government, in collaboration and consultation with the associations of the disabled, shall be able to develop an innovative approach using a variety of media for conveying information, including the principles and objectives of the World Programme of Action to audiences which are not regularly reached by conventional media or which are unaccustomed to using such media.

The Zambia Federation of the Disabled is embarking on a nationwide public education campaign through radio and television, which will run for 13 weeks each on radio and television. The target groups are the government, employers, the general public, and the disabled themselves. This will assist in raising the consciousness of the disabled and making the public aware of the need to change negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities.

For us, therefore, the commemoration of the end of the Decade is a time to take stock of our achievements and of the obstacles encountered in the implementation of the Programme of Action, and to decide on follow-up action to the Decade so as to maintain and sustain the momentum achieved in the implementation of the Programme of Action. The experience gained during the Decade should serve as a springboard for further action in the years ahead. We should emerge from the past Decade reinvigorated and ready to overcome the challenges presented by the many obstacles that have hindered the full implementation of the Programme of Action for the Decade.

As pointed out in the report of the Secretary-General before us, there is a firm relationship between disability and socio-economic development. Indeed, the prerequisites for achieving the goals of the Programme of Action

(Mr. Maka, Zambia)

are economic and social development, equitable redistribution of resources and income, as well as improvement in the living standards of populations.

For developing countries, in particular the least developed among them, the scarcity of financial resources is a major impediment to progress no matter how much political will there is in favour of improving the status of people with disabilities, integrating them into the mainstream of society, and enabling them to contribute effectively to national development. The scarcity of financial resources in developing countries translates as a lack of ability to develop human resources, and the disabled are among those who suffer most from this constraint. In this regard, I wish to express Zambia's gratitude to those donor countries and agencies which have extended and continue to extend financial support to promote the interests and the human rights of the disabled in developing countries, including the promotion of sports for the disabled.

We all recognize that the disabled are the most vulnerable members of our societies. In countries such as my own, the vulnerable segments of our society now face the serious threat of economic insecurity as a result of the poor performance of the economy and of drought. Zambia has responded to this challenge of insecurity by establishing safety nets and other social programmes targeted to the poor and vulnerable. However, the challenge of the scarcity of financial resources has always been lurking in the background. It is in the light of this constraint that my delegation is among those advocating increased channelling of resources towards programmes aimed at improving the welfare of the disabled.

We are concluding the Decade of Disabled Persons in an improved international political environment. The end of the cold war has brought in

(Mr. Maka, Zambia)

its wake the renewed interest and commitment of the international community to questions of human rights and democracy. Zambia sees this development as providing unique opportunities for nations to entrench the rights of the disabled in the mainstream of policy formulation. Without the protection and promotion of the human rights of the disabled, it is rather difficult to imagine that Governments can be in a position to improve the welfare of disabled persons. The basic lever of entrenchment is the enactment of legislation to protect the rights of disabled persons, which must be followed by effective implementation of legislative instruments.

My Government is in the process of overhauling legal and institutional mechanisms for improving the welfare of disabled persons. The initial step has been the creation of a new Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, which I have the privilege to head. We are now in the process of building an information database and improving coordination among agencies looking after the welfare of disabled persons. After this, we shall embark on overhauling the legislative instruments.

As we leave this Hall, the challenge for us all is to adopt measures at the national, regional and international levels to ensure that the achievements of the Decade are built upon. The raising of awareness about the plight, rights, needs and potential of disabled persons has been a major achievement of the Decade. We now need to follow up that awareness with concrete actions that will make a difference in the lives of the disabled. We therefore believe that the conclusions reached at the recent Montreal Conference of Ministers Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities will provide some follow-up mechanisms for future collaboration at the international level.

Mr. GODOY (Cuba) (interpretation from Spanish): I wish to begin by conveying to the Government and the people of Egypt the condolences of Cuba for the loss of human life suffered in the tragedy that has struck that country.

Increasing international attention has been focused on the situation of the disabled, as demonstrated by the scope and level of the debate at this session of the General Assembly. In the last 10 years we have achieved greater awareness of and world-wide concern for the situation of the disabled. In the United Nations that has come about through the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons. But many concerns remain.

There is very little evidence of a substantial improvement in the situation of disabled persons during the Decade that is now coming to an end. In our view, improvement in the world-wide situation of disabled persons, their integration into society and respect for them as human beings can be

(Mr. Godoy, Cuba)

achieved only through political will on the part of all States to make these goals a priority and through effective international cooperation for the development of all countries without discrimination.

It is obvious - and it has been recognized by the vast majority of the international community - that disability is closely linked to economic and social factors, in particular to economic and social development, the redistribution of resources and income, and the standard of living of the population. The Secretary-General himself, in his report to the Assembly, mentioned those factors as a prerequisite for achieving the goals of the World Programme of Action; he stressed that those goals will be attained only if programmes of international cooperation are expanded beyond their current scope.

The deteriorating economic and social situation has harmed programmes and services for this segment of the population; this has led to increased social marginalization of the disabled. Chances are that this situation will deteriorate even more, as international economic relations continue to block the access of most countries to development by witholding the resources they need to remedy the major causes of disability.

Many of those causes are preventable, thanks to advances in medicine, proper diet, access to health and education services - in a word, access to conditions for a life in dignity. Achieving the necessary levels would have made it possible to prevent the diseases that cause the irreversible damage incurred by the majority of the world's 500 million disabled persons, most of whom live in developing countries.

(Mr. Godoy, Cuba)

More than a quarter of the world's population has no access to the most basic health services; more than a billion persons live in absolute poverty, and they are the main victims of disease, hunger, malnutrition, environmental pollution and other disgraceful conditions that affect the health and physical and mental growth of millions among the marginalized and the forgotten disabled.

It is urgent - indeed vital - to change an unjust international economic order that denies to the countries of the South the right to fight the main causes of disability in their countries. True international cooperation for economic and social development for all countries - apart from being a responsibility of the United Nations and of all States - is a moral duty towards the humanity of the disabled. This is not a mere North-South division, for in the North too there is a separate world of the dispossessed. This is a human tragedy that deserves the greatest attention and support.

We can proclaim Decades and international Days; we can adopt programmes of action and resolutions; we can enact national legislation and take other national and international steps to improve the situation of disabled persons and integrate them into society. But it will all be in vain without the political will to place this problem high on the list of priorities of the United Nations and of the world's States.

The point is not to pity the disabled or to act out of charity; we must face the problem as a whole, as a social phenomenon affecting all of mankind, especially those living in underdevelopment. The fate of disabled persons is closely linked with changes in unjust international economic relations and in social models that perpetuate poverty.

(Mr. Godoy, Cuba)

Disabled persons must be given the opportunity to be integrated into society, to participate in the economic and social development of their countries, to receive the needed medical, social and financial attention, to have access to employment on a priority basis and to have the guaranteed right as citizens to education, culture, sports and any other activities that form a part of national life.

Before the revolution in our country, the world of the disabled was a world of paternalism and marginalization; the main causes of disability were the same as in any other poor country. As a developing country with few resources, Cuba has been able to make progress towards eradicating those causes and towards treating the disabled. That is because since 1959 the policy has been that protecting the physical and mental health of the population is a fundamental responsibility and a high priority for the Cuban State. That has meant taking steps to guarantee these services, based on the principles of free, unlimited access by all Cubans to health and education services.

It has thus been possible to have a health system covering the entire population, which has enabled us to eradicate the communicable diseases that are still the scourge of the third world. We have developed advanced programmes of mother and child care, of immunization, and of early detection of conditions, which makes possible appropriate treatment of various diseases that cause disabilities. Sufficient food has been made available to meet the basic needs of the population.

It is not only standards of living and health that have helped improve the situation of disabled persons in my country. The national educational system guarantees everyone the right to participate in it. There is a special place in that system for education for the disabled; we have established a network of special schools to serve pupils with dysfunctions, guaranteeing everyone the right and the opportunity to achieve a better life.

Cuba has had to develop its programmes in an economic situation that is made difficult by the hardening of the economic bockade imposed against our country by the Government of the United States. This prevents access to the necessary resources and technology, with serious effects on our social development programmes - in particular, those designed for the disabled. It would be dishonest towards the disabled of Cuba not to stand before this Assembly and demand respect for their human rights and their humanity by denouncing, and stressing the immoral and inhuman nature of, this aggressive policy that inflicts such cruelty in this area.

Yet, despite the adversity we face, attention to the individual and to his problems will remain a priority of our revolution because of the deep humanistic convictions of a society that places the human being at the centre of its concerns.

Mr. PASHOVSKI (Bulgaria): Let me at the very outset express my delegation's heartfelt condolences to the delegation of Egypt in connection with the earthquake that struck Cairo, causing numerous deaths and injuries.

It is my honour and pleasure to speak on behalf of the Bulgarian delegation at this meeting convened to mark the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. It is the firm commitment of the present Government of democratic Bulgaria to overcome one of the negative legacies of the previous regime - the hypocritical pretence that all is well in the social sphere. That policy resulted in deliberately ignoring the needs of vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. Those problems are now an integral element in my Government's overall measures of social policy-making and policy-adjustment.

During the four meetings yesterday and today we have heard a number of emotional and impressive statements by high-level representatives of Member States as well as by representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations gathered here to appraise the achievements of the Decade. I should like to express the hope of my delegation that this discussion will identify and develop policies and programmes for the disabled on the basis of the comprehensive report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/47/415.

My delegation cannot but agree with the multilateral approach of Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali to issues concerning disabled persons and related activities in the framework of the United Nations system. The successful prevention of major causes of disability is closely linked to the strengthening of the new forms and trends of international cooperation that are taking shape in the United Nations.

(Mr. Pashovski, Bulgaria)

The United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons has been a period of awareness-raising and action-oriented measures aimed at continued improvement of the situation of persons with disabilities. My delegation considers the increased international awareness of the need for a shift away from charity towards comprehensive social development to be one of the main achievements of the Decade. We welcome the main idea behind the policies and activities undertaken during the Decade, namely, the equalization of opportunities for the disabled as well as rehabilitation and the prevention of disability.

Despite the comprehensive Programme of Action and the many activities at both the international and the national levels, progress in attaining the main goals of the Decade has been slow. And here we come again to the need for an integrated approach to those issues: disability is closely linked to economic and social factors. The Bulgarian delegation is convinced that the lofty objectives of the Decade cannot be reached without expanding and intensifying international cooperation programmes for development. The main goals of the Programme of Action have been hindered by social and economic deterioration, low global growth rates, high unemployment and reduced public expenditure, as well as by current structural-adjustment programmes under way now, especially in the countries in transition.

Despite the difficulties ensuing from the process of transition in Bulgaria, disability issues have become an integral part of my country's social programmes during the United Nations Decade. Long-term arrangements have been made on the national and the local levels for addressing problems related to prevention of impairment, disability and handicaps, vocational rehabilitation and the employment of handicapped and disabled persons.

Headway has been made in creating equal conditions for an independent life for handicapped and disabled persons and in ensuring full access to information and public education. A system for social studies has been established, enabling us to estimate the number of handicapped children and those with serious forms of disability, and to identify their problems. A national programme of action has been worked out, aimed at preventing and reducing disability and illness and at lowering the death rate from cerebral and cardiovascular impairments.

Considerable efforts have been made in Bulgaria to solve a series of problems related to handicapped children and disabled persons in general, through the supply of orthopaedic and technical aids and facilities and an increase in social benefits for the disabled. Original approaches have been found to tackle vocational-rehabilitation issues concerning persons with disabilities. A system of "indoor patronage" has been tested in practice, with the aim of rendering various services to thousands of disabled persons.

Continuing to speak of my country's national experience in addressing the issues of disability, I should like to emphasize the establishment of various organizations of the disabled with a view to enabling them to take an active part in discussing and handling their own problems. The Union of the Blind and the Union of the Deaf are well established organizations that play a very active role in Bulgaria. In 1989 the Union of Disabled Persons was founded. Along with blind and deaf persons that Union also includes individuals with impairments of the motor system and those suffering from chronic internal illnesses.

(Mr. Pashovski, Bulgaria)

It is important, however, to point out that the present severe economic situation has a negative impact on all spheres of Bulgaria's social activities. Thus far, the transition to a free-market economy has badly hit a number of social groups in my country. By introducing social safety nets and readjusting policy-making, the Government is doing its best to provide what is necessary so that disabled persons are affected by the recession as little as possible. For instance, disabled persons have been provided with additional invalid-pension benefits and advantages in acquiring medicines and in using city transport. They also enjoy reduced fares for railway and water transport, and some free trips.

The report of the Secretary-General contains a number of worthy recommendations aimed at moving the disability Programme and the activities of our Organization from awareness-raising to action. Our main task now is to implement the guidelines and policy documents developed over the Decade. The three major ones among them are the Programme of Action, the long-term strategy, and the equalization of opportunities for disabled persons, which sets global standards supported by an effective monitoring system.

The recommendations of the Secretary-General's report require action at two principal levels: national and international. I should like to confirm from this high rostrum the commitment of my Government to bring about the successful fulfilment of the objectives of the aforementioned key documents along with the recommendations of the Secretary-General.

In conclusion, I should like to express my delegation's support of the draft resolution, which proclaims 3 December as the International Day of Disabled Persons. On that particular date in 1982, the Assembly adopted resolution 37/53 and announced thereby the beginning of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. It is my understanding that the unanimous adoption of this resolution will bring to a proper conclusion the fruitful debate during the four plenary meetings of the General Assembly devoted to the issues related to persons with disabilities.

Prince DLAMINI (Swaziland): The Kingdom of Swaziland joins the world in expressing its condolences on the tragedy that befell our brothers and sisters in Egypt. We should like to express through you, Sir, our deepest sympathy to the Government, the people, and especially all those who lost their loved ones.

I realize that it is a bit too late and the majority of us here are a bit tired. But the truth is that we could not all have spoken at once; otherwise, chaos would have been among us here. Those of us who came to speak would therefore like to express our sincere thanks to you, Sir, and your staff for giving us the opportunity to hear the things that we heard and to say the things we feel should be said in this Assembly.

On behalf of His Majesty, King Mswati III, the Government and all the people of the Kingdom of Swaziland, I and my delegation take delight in addressing this forty-seventh session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. Before I present my views, I feel tempted to express our appreciation that, in the spirit of the recognition and awareness of people with disabilities, the President of the United States of America has seen fit that Dr. Bruce Halliday of Canada be honoured for his vision and services on behalf of the plight of people with disabilities. May I also hasten to say that, in my view, there was no better time or venue to present this award than in Montreal and at this October meeting of the ministers of the world responsible for the affairs of people with disabilities.

For those of us who stand here representing the people who might never have a chance of seeing or meeting with Dr. Bruce Halliday, we say on their behalf: "Thank you very much. We assure you and promise to carry your name and deeds to our various countries, to those people whom you have been working for".

To come back to my story, may I say that it may not be easy to speak again on this subject without sounding repetitious. But, with all due respect, this is meant to emphasize both the seriousness of the subject in question and the concern of those who may not have the opportunity to speak on

(Prince Dlamini, Swaziland)

their own behalf. The theme of my presentation in Montreal was on sensitizing the public to the plight of people with disabilities. Because of the time factor, I touched a bit on the problems of small countries like mine, Swaziland, and others in carrying out our duties as regards problems faced by people with disabilities.

In my intervention, I pointed out that I do not believe in hand-outs. No wonder I subscribe to the philosophy: "Do not give a man fish, but rather teach him how to fish to manage his own life." By this, I meant to align myself with the observation and suggestion that, to combat this problem, we too in developing countries need to have technicians and experts in medicine, education, and occupational areas who will appreciate and understand about disabilities.

May I also add that we do have such people who are entrusted with and can master these courses if and when given the chances. By "chances", I refer to their soliciting and acquiring places and scholarships in relevant institutions of learning. This would relieve us of such burdens as we have in our schools and institutions in places like Swaziland and others. For instance, in my own country, in our speech and hearing school at Siteki, we lack trained personnel. The same applies at the school for the deaf.

Despite all these inconveniences, the Government has nevertheless put up institutions like the Vocational Rehabilitation Centre, where persons with disabilities are being trained. We also have a transitional workshop, where the Government, with the help of the United Nations Development Programme, assists our people in practising what they have learned, while at the same time searches for places of employment both in government and in the private

(Prince Dlamini, Swaziland)

sector. Having said that, it is no wonder that I welcome the creation of an inter-ministeral task force that will also work with a view to transferring technology to our developing world.

Ever since our meeting in Montreal and here in this Assembly, listening to speakers has brought to my mind memories of a fairy tale in my country which, by your permission, Sir, I shall tell. In a certain humble homestead, while the mother was away, the eldest and most trustworthy child became very mischievous, and warned the younger one never to mention what had transpired during the absence of the mother, to which the younger one acceded.

While they were having supper that evening, the elder chld kept looking very scornfully at the young one, trying to make sure that she did not raise the subject. The young one responded by forcefully asking, "Why do you keep on looking at me like that? Do you actually think I told mommy about what you were doing? No, I never did. Ask her." I need not tell you of the look of despair and disappointment on the face of the mother. She had discovered by mistake that her trusted, obedient child was incapable of doing right in her absence.

I relate this primitive story as an analogy with us, Governments and politicians, people entrusted and empowered to legislate and administer the affairs of our fellow citizens. For us, as Governments, as organizations and as individuals, to be reminded of 1982 as the year that saw the celebrated declaration of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, and the confession that not much has been achieved or done over the years and that now we have even more persons with disabilities than we did before, leaves a lot to be desired.

With the United Nations as our mother body and our various Governments its appendages, I cannot help but admit that these revelations leave us with nothing but sheer nakedness. It exposes us as Governments and peoples who have failed and are perpetually failing. It exposes our insincerity, our insensitivity and the uncaring attitude we have always displayed towards the plight of those members of our society who could do just as well given an opportunity.

Yesterday I heard Mr. Malinga of Zimbabwe, the Chairman of the Disabled People's International, read out some very sad quotations by some of our brothers and sisters with disabilities. It is not the best thing to hear these words:

(Prince Dlamini, Swaziland)

> "It is always the people who believe themselves to be normal who make the mistake of automatically underestimating me."

It must touch someone with a conscience to hear a fellow-countryman lament:

> "It is a story of depression. These stories are untold to the world, and government is not serious about the welfare of those who are invalids. There is only lip-service. In my country, one who is rendered disabled becomes a street beggar and complete destitute."

With those words of anguish and lamentation, I ask you, Where is the source of pride of all of us here who are in government, regardless of what country we come from?

How good it is that people with disabilities are not calling for hand-outs nor are they waiting for crocodile tears. All they need, all they want, and all they deserve is what most of us already have, and that is nothing other than an equal opportunity in all forms of human endeavours. That opportunity means full rights and participation in all human activities.

Coming as I do from Swaziland, one of the developing countries, and knowing too that we have not done enough for, and together with, persons with disabilities, I note with satisfaction and appreciation what others in some other countries, governments and ministers, have achieved and aspire to for the sake of people with disabilities. I have in mind countries like Canada, and if I may speak on behalf of the distant many, let me say that we certainly applaud the attitude, the vision, the energy of the Canadian Secretary of State and Minister responsible for the status of disabled persons, the Honourable Robert de Cotret.

Mr. KAMARA (Sierra Leone): Please permit me to begin by expressing, on behalf of the Sierra Leone delegation, profound condolences to the Government and people of the Republic of Egypt on the severe disaster that befell them two days ago, which resulted in heavy loss of life and property. We share their grief and we sincerely hope and pray that God will console the bereaved families and the entire nation.

We are all quite aware already that we are here to commemorate the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, which was an extremely important initiative designed to continue to raise awareness of disability-related issues. As has been abundantly emphasized by various speakers, we have now reached the end of the awareness-raising aspect and the beginning of the action phase. In this regard, I should like to give some idea of what Sierra Leone has managed to achieve over the Decade and what plans are afoot for improving the lives and living conditions of disabled people in that country, despite the many constraints with which we are confronted. I am sure that many people are aware of our recent plight caused by the rebel incursion. I will come to that.

Over the years since the early 1950s a number of voluntary organizations dedicated to serving different categories of disability groups have sprung up in the country, starting with the Blind Welfare Committee in 1951. This came into being through the influence of the then-British Empire Society for the Blind, subsequently known as the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind and now as Sight Savers. That Blind Welfare Committee later got a charter to become the Sierra Leone Blind Welfare Society.

Following in the footsteps of that organization, the Cheshire Homes Association and the National Society for the Deaf came into existence in the early 1960s. Then, early in the 1970s the Society for Mentally Retarded Children was born. All these organizations set out primarily to take care of the educational needs of children belonging to their respective disability groups: they built schools for those children. There was hardly any practical effort to address the needs of disabled adults. Moreover, there were no reliable statistics on the number of disabled people in the country or of the prevalence and incidence of any given disabling condition.

The first attempt at addressing the needs of disabled adults was made by the Government in 1971, when a farmcraft centre for blind male adults was established in the eastern region of the country under the then Ministry of Social Welfare - now the Division of Social Services in the Department of Health and Social Services - with the financial and technical assistance of the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind. That institution was meant to train blind male adults in basic gardening and handicraft skills in a rural setting.

Up to that point in time there was no viable organization of disabled persons themselves to influence the course of events in their own interests. The first attempt at setting up such an organization came in the late 1960s, when an organization of the blind was set up by a few blind people, including myself. Unfortunately, however, it was short lived. It was not until 1976 that the Sierra Leone Association of the Blind eventually managed to get off the ground; it has continued to survive, in spite of some hiccoughs.

Meanwhile, in 1972 the Government started to show interest in the welfare of disabled adults in general, especially in the areas of rehabilitation and job placement. Thus, in October 1972 a small unit was set up in the then

Ministry of Social Welfare and given responsibility for supervising some aspects of rehabilitation of the handicapped and securing job opportunities for suitably qualified handicapped persons. It is gratifying to note that right from that point a handicapped person was put in charge of that unit.

This move by the Government seemed to give impetus to efforts by voluntary non-governmental organizations to explore areas of rehabilitating disabled persons in various parts of the country. For instance, the Seventh Day Adventist Mission started a rehabilitation programme for victims of leprosy and polio at their hospital at Massanga in the northern region in collaboration with the leprosy control programme. The Catholic Mission also started a workshop in the northern region for the manufacture of prosthetic and orthopaedic appliances as well as for the rehabilitation of some polio and leprosy victims.

In the mid-1970s, the Baptist Mission, with the financial and technical assistance of Germany's Mission to the blind, started an agricultural rehabilitation programme for the blind at a small village near the town of Lunsar in the North, where there is a high incidence of onchocerciasis. That programme has been operating on the basis of the concept of community-based rehabilitation.

Efforts in the areas of both educating disabled children and rehabilitating disabled adults have continued to increase over the years, especially since 1981, which the General Assembly declared as the International Year of Disabled Persons. For instance, the number of schools both for blind and for deaf children increased from one to two each. One must admit that, given the estimated population of blind children - a little over 100,000 - and that of deaf children - just a little under 90,000 - in a national population of 4 million, two schools for each of those categories,

(Mr. Kamara, Sierra Leone)

each school having less than 100 pupils, is grossly inadequate. But there are plans to improve the situation when funds and other resources become available.

Since the beginning of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons a number of developments in the disability field have taken place in our country, although at a rather slow pace. That is because of a number of factors including economic decline and socio-political instability, especially recently with the onset of the rebel incursion in the eastern and southern regions of the country: a direct spillover from the Liberian civil war next door.

It is rather unfortunate that throughout the Decade and until quite recently disabled persons themselves have played a rather low-key role in their own affairs in my country. This was dictated largely by economic constraints and to some extent a lack of motivation. It was only towards the end of the Decade - more specifically between 1990 and this year - that some organizations of disabled persons, such as the polio victims' association, the Sierra Leone Young Disabled Persons Organisation and the Sierra Leone Association of the Blind, made some moves towards getting the voice of the disabled heard in the right places.

For instance, in two days' time, on 15 October, the Sierra Leone Blind Welfare Society will be observing White Cane Day for the first time in the country's history. October has been declared the Month of the Blind in Sierra Leone. My minister will be making a radio broadcast on Thursday morning.

(Mr. Kamara, Sierra Leone)

The situation has been helped immensely since 29 April this year, when a new, energetic, youthful and concerned regime took over the reins of Governemnt of the country. It has since manifested a great deal of interest in the welfare not only of non-disabled but of disabled citizens as well. It is a manifestation of this positive development that I am here today, a totally blind person representing my country at this very important gathering. Perhaps, had it been another regime, a non-disabled person would have stood here.

(Mr. Kamara, Sierra Leone)

Various international non-governmental organizations and members of the United Nations family have made very significant contributions, directly or indirectly, towards improving the situation of the disabled in our country over the Decade. For instance, in late 1984 and early 1985 the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) funded a national disability survey, which was carried out jointly by the then Ministry of Social Welfare and Rural Development and the then Ministry of National Development and Economic Planning. This survey had three main objectives: first, to determine the prevalence and incidence of different types of disability in the country; secondly, to establish the number of disabled infants, young children and women in the country; and, thirdly, to find out the different types of institutions serving the different categories of disabled persons in the country, with the overall goal of improving such services.

As a result of that disability survey, it was discovered that the general trend in the disability ratio in the country was within the United Nations estimate of 10 per cent of the total population. It was also discovered that much of this disability trend was a result of vitamin deficiency, genetic defects, childhood diseases and accidents. Due to the rebel incursion that I have already mentioned, it is expected that war-affected areas of the country will experience a much higher degree of disablement as a result of both war-inflicted injuries and diseases caused by malnutrition owing to the lack of food in the war-affected areas. At this point, it is interesting to note that even the present Head of State would have ended up being disabled as a result of a war injury he sustained at the front last year, but for sheer luck on his part.

(Mr. Kamara, Sierra Leone)

In 1988 UNICEF sponsored the participation of a senior officer of my Ministry - the then Ministry of Rural Development, Social Services and Youth - in a symposium on visually handicapped infants and young children that took place in Edinburgh, Scotland, from 7 to 13 August. In 1989 UNICEF again manifested further interest in the welfare of disabled infants and young children by sponsoring a one-day symposium on childhood disability in Sierra Leone and its medical, social and economic implications, which took place in Freetown in April of that year. More recently, UNICEF again sponsored a one-day symposium on the plight of disabled infants and young children in Sierra Leone, which took place, again in Freetown, on 21 May this year.

But over and above all this, UNICEF's efforts in the extended programme of immunization have made a great mark and have contributed tremendously towards curbing the disability trend in the country caused by the major childhood disabling diseases, such as poliomyelitis, whooping cough, measles, diphtheria and so on, which often lead not only to disability but even to death. Over the years since the start of this programme in the mid-1980s the coverage of immunization against these diseases for children below five years of age has risen most impressively, from about 6 per cent at the beginning of the programme to over 60 per cent.

It is therefore with great delight that I register our deep gratitude for the important role that UNICEF has played during the Decade of Disabled Persons towards both curbing the incidence of disablement and addressing the needs of disabled infants and young children in Sierra Leone. It is also extremely important to note that UNICEF has helped to set up an organization for aid to disabled infants and young children in the country.

In view of this very impressive role that UNICEF has played and continues to play in the field of disability, I wish to seize this opportunity to appeal to other United Nations agencies and other international non-governmental organizations - those already operating in Sierra Leone, such as the Christian Children's Fund, Foster Parents Plan International, Save the Children Fund, Action Aid, and so on, and those not yet established in Sierra Leone - to emulate the brilliant example already set by UNICEF in the interests of the disabled.

Finally, I would like to mention something about my participation in the Seventeenth World Congress of Rehabilitation International, which took place in Nairobi, Kenya, from 7 to 11 September this year, and one of the post-Congress seminars that also took place in Nairobi, from 12 to 13 September. My reason for this is mainly to express the sincere hope that the Nairobi Plan of Action for the 1990s and beyond, as well as the recommendations in the Secretary-General's report, will be taken into very serious consideration not only by our various Governments, but also by disabled persons themselves and the general public in our respective nations to make them a reality and to ensure the Decade is not forgotten, but that, as other speakers have already said, it is only the beginning of things to come for the betterment of the disabled in our countries and the world over.

Mr. TÜRK (Slovenia): At the outset, I should like to express, on behalf of the delegation of Slovenia, sincere condolences to the Government and people of Egypt at this tragic moment, when Cairo has been struck by a terrible earthquake. At this moment of tragedy, the people of Egypt has the solidarity and sympathy of the Government and people of Slovenia.

Our statement on the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons will be short and concise, concentrating on certain major policy elements pursued by the Government of Slovenia.

Slovenia is a new Member of the United Nations and a new independent State. Nevertheless, our Government pays particular attention to the protection of disabled perons and has taken the objectives of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons seriously. In 1991, the year of Slovenia's independence, the Parliament adopted a strategy of development for the protection of disabled persons, taking into account the objectives of the United Nations Decade.

Protection is one of the two principal policy elements of the strategy. It is geared, however, towards creating conditions for the independent existence of each disabled person, upholding his or her dignity and full enjoyment of human rights.

The policy includes a series of measures targeted on the protection of specific groups of disabled, namely, children, adults, the elderly and disabled refugees. Disabled children enjoy cost-free education and special vocational training at the primary-school level. All disabled children enjoy cost-free health care. Their parents and guardians enjoy considerable tax alleviation and benefits in matters of housing, as well as preferential status in matters of social benefits. It is possible for disabled youths to find meaningful employment with the assistance of specialized institutions.

Special benefits are provided for adult disabled persons; they range from tax benefits to special incentives for enterprises that employ disabled persons. Naturally, the benefits in the field of health care and rehabilitation constitute an important part of the Goverment's policy in this domain.

Elderly disabled persons enjoy other types of protection, including special medical assistance, which is available to them either at their homes or in specialized hospitals.

The policies pursued by the Government are an important feature of the overall care for and protection of disabled persons in Slovenia. However, the Government is fully aware that Government action alone cannot yield optimal results. Effective participation of the disabled is vital - and this is the second main policy element. Effective participation is necessary both at the level of policy design and in the implementation of policies. Only such participation can produce appropriate medical, social and occupational integration of disabled persons into the wider society. Moreover, the need to foster prevention, early detection and medical rehabilitation of disability requires the effective participation of the disabled.

In Slovenia there are around 140,000 disabled persons, or 7 per cent of the total population. All of them are involved in the work of appropriate associations freely established by the disabled themselves. The Government of Slovenia actively supports those organizations through different incentives and subsidies and, above all, as a source from which most valuable initiatives emerge.

In recent months many of those initiatives have been devoted to problems concerning disabled refugees. The total number of refugees in Slovenia at present is 100,000, which is roughly 5 per cent of the total population. Most of them come from wartorn areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and many of them are disabled. Their problems, including mental problems, are extremely serious and they require help. The Governmnt institutions of Slovenia and institutions created by the disabled persons in Slovenia are rendering that help.

Slovenia wishes to be active in the international efforts in the field of assistance to disabled persons. We have expertise and professional experience. We have already established cooperation with the United Nations Office for the Decade of Disabled Persons in Vienna. The end of the Decade does not mean the end of action - quite the contrary. For Slovenia, it means the beginning of the process of expanded cooperation in the United Nations

(Mr. Türk, Slovenia)

effort in this domain. We are looking forward to practical action for expansion of that cooperation, in particular through our cooperation with the United Nations Office in Vienna.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from French): We have just heard the last speaker in the debate on this agenda item. Given the lateness of the hour, and in order to allow a substantial number of Member States to participate in the consideration of draft resolution A/47/L.4, the General Assembly will take a decision on the draft resolution as the last item on the agenda of its meeting for tomorrow morning.

The meeting rose at 11 p.m.